

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

**A History of the Jewish Community of Potchefstroom and Environs.**

Paul Cheifitz  
(CHFPAU001)

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the  
degree of Master of Arts in History.

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2009

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*11 February 2009*

Signed by candidate
---------------------

## **Table of Contents**

Abstract.	1
Introduction.	2
Chapter 1: Early Beginnings.	4
Chapter 2: The 1890's – The Foundations of a Community.	16
Chapter 3: Potchefstroom and the South African War 1899-1902.	32
Chapter 4: Reconstruction 1902-1914.	52
Chapter 5: Consolidation 1914-1929.	68
Chapter 6: Hard Times 1929-1945.	89
Chapter 7: The Post War Years 1945-1967.	111
Chapter 8: Epilogue 1968-2008.	126
Bibliography.	135

**Abstract.**

This study builds on a range of archival sources and traces the history of Potchefstroom Jewry from the mid-nineteenth century to 2008. Beginning with the immigrant experience the processes of assimilation, acculturation and secularization are explored. The Jewish community developed in parallel with the fortunes of the town until external factors prompted the departure of individuals and families to other centres. The inner workings of the communal organizations and the role of functionaries are investigated, as is the individual experience.

## Introduction

The past decade has seen a resurgence of interest in Jewish participation in South African country community life. In an effort to preserve valuable historic source material and record the memories of former local residents a number of detailed histories have been produced.<sup>1</sup> A general overview of Jewish participation in every small South African centre is also in the process of being completed.<sup>2</sup> These studies are building a clear picture of Jewish life and participation and making of South African history. Almost all the Jewish communities of these towns follow similar patterns, from the time of their inception until their ultimate demise.

The history of Potchefstroom's Jewish community is inextricably linked to the broader South African Jewish experience. From its earliest origins the tribulations of the immigrant experience are mirrored in small towns throughout the country. As these communities grew their transformation from an exclusive group of immigrant pioneers to a modern grouping within the wider host society is observed. While assimilation and acculturation became an inevitable outcome, the community made every effort to maintain its core identity.<sup>3</sup> The question of financing the community and its institutions, together with member apathy were a source of continuous problem. Furthermore the transience of many of its number, especially in the early years lead to an ever changing membership. The revolving door of country reverends continuously disturbed the continuity of religious observance and teaching. It remains a testament to the community's leadership that they were able to maintain their institutions through these trying times.

Source material showing the Jewish involvement in Potchefstroom's long history is rich and plentiful. The use of "The Kropman Collection," a unique set of documents,

---

<sup>1</sup> For examples see C Wiener, *The History of the Pietersburg (Polokwane) Jewish Community*, Herzliya, 2007 and D Coetzee, *Immigrants to Citizens: Civil Integration and Acculturation of the Jews into Oudtshoorn Society, 1874-1999*, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of History, UCT, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities, Volume 1*, Johannesburg, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

newspaper cuttings and photographs, collected for a reunion exhibition, has been invaluable. This material has been extensively supplemented by archival documents, communal papers, family records and oral testimony. Together these records portray a clear picture of Jewish life in Potchefstroom.

## Chapter 1: Early Beginnings.

The early history of the North West Province, formerly a part of the Northern Transvaal, is intricately linked with the departure of the Voortrekkers from the Cape Colony in the mid 1830's. Dissatisfied with British rule and the Cape government's inability to protect its frontier farmers from Xhosa raids, it was decided to move north of the Orange River where this group of farmers created a sovereign state. Most importantly for them, they would have land of their own and self determination. Parties of Voortrekkers established themselves in small groupings throughout the interior as far North as the Limpopo River. In this area they began to establish small republics loosely aligned to one another.<sup>1</sup>

Andries Hendrik Potgieter, one of the Voortrekker leaders, journeyed together with a party of about 100 people into the interior and reached the Mooi River, beside which he found favourable grazing land and an abundant supply of water. The resident Ndebele tribe, that had been in the area for at least two centuries, did not challenge Potgieter's claim to the land. In November 1838 the trekkers established a town there.<sup>2</sup> After much rain during the summer of 1840 it was discovered that the town had been built on a marsh<sup>3</sup> and was removed to its present site on the Western bank of the Mooi River where construction began again in 1841.<sup>4</sup> The settlement was first referred as Mooiriviersdorp but was later to become Potchefstroom. There has been much speculation over the origin of this name, but it is generally agreed that Potchefstroom originates from a combination of the words, Potgieter, chef (meaning chief) and stroom (referring to the river beside which the town is situated). It has been further hypothesized that "chef" actually originates from the Dutch "scherf" meaning a broken pot, being symbolic of the cracks in the clay on the banks of the river.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> H Giliomee, and B Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2007, pp. 150-158.

<sup>2</sup> G Jenkins, *A Century History – The Story of Potchefstroom*, A A Balkema, Cape Town, 1971, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Bulpin, TV, *Discovering South Africa*, CNA, Johannesburg, 1992, p 865.

<sup>4</sup> Jenkins, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 8 and *Sunday Times* 18 Aug 1991.

The 1840's was a time of great tribulation for the settlers who struggled amongst themselves to build the society for which they had fought so hard. Potchefstroom was the capital of the area settled by these trekkers in what was later to become known as the Transvaal and the North Western Orange Free State. By 1848 Potchefstroom was publishing its own newspaper, *Oude Emigrant*, which contained articles in both Dutch and English.<sup>6</sup> Even at this early stage there were quite a number of English settlers in the town. It was only in 1849 that Potchefstroom framed its own constitution, which upheld the rights of self-governance, mutual respect for fellow citizens, and a code of ethics by which to live.<sup>7</sup> During the intervening period Britain was displeased with the trekkers' occupation of land and hoped to gain dominance over this newly settled area. The Sand River Convention of 1852 assured the new South African Republic of its right to self-governance and sovereignty. The British had to concede to the demands of the Boer-led government as Mosheshwe, leader of the Ndebele, had threatened to continue attacking the Cape's frontier. The Boers also had to make some concessions and notable among these was that they would discontinue the practice of keeping slaves and not make any other alliances with Black tribes in their region.<sup>8</sup> The *Volksraad* (Government) of the South African Republic met at Potchefstroom in June 1852 and finally recognized the town as their official capital. They also passed laws encompassing transport, licensing, and the powers to be granted to Landdrosts. The Republic still had no president.<sup>9</sup>

In 1854 a gold prospector, P. Marais, of Cape Town, set out for the South African Republic after failing to find any deposits of gold in the Cape. He felt that considering the geological formations which he encountered the country had "considerable richness" to offer. After much unrewarding exploration in the Potchefstroom area he moved up to the Crocodile River where he found small amounts of gold dust. When he reached the Witwatersrand he was summoned to Potchefstroom and asked to appear before the Volksraad. Marais was severely reprimanded for not obtaining permission to carry out his exploration. It was feared that if gold was found the British would become greatly

---

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid pp. 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 150-158.

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins, pp. 11-22.



interested in the area and hostilities would break out. After apologizing to the members of the Volksraad and having shown them his meager findings Marais was employed to further his search. Had he found any rich deposits of gold, the Volksraad promised to give him a reward of £5000. Although Marais was unsuccessful in his search, the reports of “gold dust” were heard throughout the Cape Colony, and later across the world. This news precipitated the influx of prospectors into the South African Republic. It was hoped that gold fields would be discovered that might yield as much profit as those in California and Australia.<sup>10</sup>

Among the early prospectors, we find an obscure reference to “one of the sons of Simeon Marcus”<sup>11</sup> living in the “neighbourhood” of Potchefstroom in 1854.<sup>12</sup> Simeon Marcus, was a Dutch Jew, who had lived in England and had settled in Grahamstown in the mid 1830’s. He was part of a small group of Jews of Anglo-German and Dutch origin who founded the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation in 1841, the first of its kind in Southern Africa.<sup>13</sup> By the 1850s there were over 120 Jews in Southern Africa. Marcus junior had been exploring in the Potchefstroom area for gold and like Marais had been prevented from announcing his findings or collecting any gold due to a legal prohibition. Marcus holds the distinction of being the first recorded Jew in Potchefstroom and in the South African Republic. There are no further references to any Jews being in the area for nearly twenty years.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Graaff-Reinet Herald* 19 Apr 1854.

<sup>11</sup> Marcus had seven sons, Lewis, Frederick, James, John, Alfred, Edward and Richard. Marcus’ youngest son Richard was born in Grahamstown in 1837. All of his other children had been born in London. It is impossible to determine which of these was living in Potchefstroom in 1854. By 1852 Simeon Marcus had died in London and his widow and most of their children had returned to London. The remaining children were resident either in Cape Town or Grahamstown where the family had set up a trading post.

<sup>12</sup> D L Sowden, “In the Transvaal till 1899”, in G Saron and L Hotz, eds., *The Jews In South Africa, A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955, p.149.

<sup>13</sup> L Herrman, *A History of the Jews in South Africa*, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 1935, pp. 114-115. Present at the inaugural meeting of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation were Simeon Marcus and his sons Lewis, Frederick and James.

<sup>14</sup> I Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community*, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, 1955, p. 174 n.34.

Political life in the Republic remained volatile and although there was still a good deal of friction within the Volksraad, Pretorius was elected President, in 1857.<sup>15</sup> The following year the new constitution of the South African Republic was framed and it was then that the capital and government was moved to Pretoria. However, Potchefstroom was still considered to be the chief town of the Republic. This was mainly due to its well established farming enterprises. Despite having lost its status as capital it remained one of the most commercially active towns in the region for many years.<sup>16</sup> The town was centred around the Dutch Reformed Church and its square, the Church being the first public building erected. The broad streets, bordered by deep water furrows, were sandy and very treacherous in wet weather when they turned to mud. The streets were lined by shady weeping willows, which often gave comfort to weary travellers. By 1866 Potchefstroom boasted a white population of twelve hundred, two hundred of whom were foreigners, and it was by far the largest town in the South African Republic.<sup>17</sup> It was at this time that the Anglican Church was first established in the town.<sup>18</sup> There were 275 houses, 15 stores, a number of small shops and 4 hotels. These factors identified Potchefstroom as the commercial centre of the growing Republic.<sup>19</sup> All transport was by means of ox wagon and there was a post cart, which travelled between the town and Port Natal. In 1872 the postal route included a weekly mail coach from Beaconsfield, soon to become the diamond rich area of Kimberley.<sup>20</sup> A year later gold was discovered at Lydenburg is causing a great stir among weary prospectors. Although they were not to settle in Potchefstroom many passed through the town en route to the fields.<sup>21</sup>

Attracted by the prospect of finding gold, an increasing number of Jews began arriving in the South African Republic in the 1870s. Many, however, would have to settle for work beside the fledgling mines, rather than in mining industry itself. Populations were transient and when someone was unable to make a success in one place it was quite simple to pack up and move on to the next mine or little town and try one's luck there.

---

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pp. 24-26.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald*, undated

<sup>20</sup> Jenkins p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 64.

Living conditions were harsh and it was not uncommon to live in a tent when first arriving in a new town. Even those lucky enough to have their own stores often slept on or behind the counter until they had saved enough money to rent a room or purchase a house of their own.<sup>22</sup>

A year after the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley, there was still much political uncertainty in the South African Republic. Apart from the political infighting the country was almost bankrupt. Britain saw this as a perfect opportunity to regain control of the land across the Vaal River. With the annexation of the Republic by Britain in early 1877, the government was assured that they would retain full powers of self-determination.<sup>23</sup> Although the British occupation was to be short lived they instituted a new taxation and licensing system, which is of considerable interest and use to the social historian. All applications for trading licenses were recorded, as was a record of those people who entered and departed from each town. Also preserved are the "Lists of Inwoners" recording those adult males who were resident within the town showing when they arrived and what their occupations were.<sup>24</sup> Once the British were established in the Transvaal they were quickly followed by the Standard Bank which opened its branch in Potchefstroom in May 1877. Their records help immeasurably to reconstruct this period in the history of the Jewish community of the town.<sup>25</sup>

Contemporary reports state that Potchefstroom was a prime example of a Transvaal town, centred on agriculture. The town produced "cattle, horses, wheat, other cereals, wool and tobacco."<sup>26</sup> Much of this produce was exported to the diamond fields of Kimberley, the Cape Colony, Natal and the Orange Free State. Potchefstroom appeared to be the commercial hub of the South African Republic and a few Jews had already begun settling in the town.<sup>27</sup> Solomon Hirschfield and Samuel Davis arrived in early 1878 and

---

<sup>22</sup> Sowden, pp. 149-164. .

<sup>23</sup> T R H Davenport, *South Africa, A Modern History*, MacMillan, London, 1991, pp. 81-83.

<sup>24</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, refs. 123, 126, 300 and 301.

<sup>25</sup> Standard Bank Archives, 442/Potch/1879.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

established their trading businesses.<sup>28</sup> By October of that year they entered into partnership and opened a retail-trading store.<sup>29</sup> Hirschfield and Davis, the Standard Bank Branch Manager reports, “were established for two years and during that time have done well. They own their store which is very well situated and substantially built and well worth £1000. The firm had a capital of £1000 when they started and are now worth £3400. Hirschfield is a Russian Jew and Davis an English Jew, both young men, honest and straight forward, without exception.”<sup>30</sup> Arriving at the same time as Hirschfield and Davis were Myer Freeman, M M Rosenthal, both traders, and Joseph Guttman.<sup>31</sup> Shortly thereafter they were joined by the partners Jacobson and Weinstein who had a “busy and safe business.”<sup>32</sup>

The Jews who were resident in Potchefstroom at this time were solely engaged in commerce. Most were general dealers while others were *smouse*<sup>33</sup> travelling around the farming districts peddling their wares.<sup>34</sup> In all certainty the *smouse* were agents for the general dealers who helped these newcomers get financially on their feet. The nationality of most of these Jews was German although there were a few English and Eastern Europeans among them. There seemed to be a large German presence in the town and many of their surnames are often thought of as being Jewish. However, Fleischak, Hoffmann, Meier and others were devout Christians. It is possible that some of these Germans immigrants were apostate Jews but this has never been established.<sup>35</sup> In many cases immigrants had relatives in other towns, some in the Cape and a few in the South African Republic. Through these connections they were able to trade between towns and thus set up a unique trading network throughout the country.<sup>36</sup> Samuel Davis brought his

<sup>28</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Signature Book, Potchefstroom 1/1/1.

<sup>29</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, no 300 (Register van Lisensies).

<sup>30</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's report 5 February 1879.

<sup>31</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Signature Book, Potchefstroom 1/1/1

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Itinerant peddlers who travelled around the rural areas hawking their goods to farmers and often buying up farmers produce. A number acted as agents for General Dealers.

<sup>34</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, no 300 (Register van Lisensies).

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> D Fleisher, and A Caccia, *Merchant Pioneers: The House of Mosenthal*, Jonathan Ball, Cape Town, 1983.

brother Harris to the Cape where he spent some time in Kimberley working as an agent. He soon joined his brother in Potchefstroom and opened a successful store of his own.<sup>37</sup>

Representing the Potchefstroom Jewish community, Solomon Hirschfield and Samuel Davis, approached the Municipality on 12 July 1880 with a request for a small piece of ground, beside the church yard, for a cemetery. That morning a Jew had died in the town and according to Jewish rites had to be buried immediately in specially consecrated ground. The chairman responded that the ground could only be apportioned by the Civil Commissioner and only for a period of two years. According to protocol the Jewish community would have to submit a petition to a public meeting where any objections would be taken into account. Due to the urgent nature of the request the chairman agreed to grant the community a plot of land, measuring three square yards, beside the general cemetery. After the meeting Hirschfield and Davis were taken to the site which was duly demarcated and consecrated.<sup>38</sup> On 9 August 1880 the land was officially transferred to the community, who were to appoint two trustees, to manage the site and take responsibility for its maintenance. A petition signed by members of the community was accepted by the municipality.<sup>39</sup> The willingness of the municipality to assist in this matter demonstrates the good relationship between the Jewish and host communities. It further shows the tolerant nature of local government towards different religious denominations. The cemetery is usually the first of the Jewish institutions created by a community and Potchefstroom was no different. The few Jews resident in the town would unite to perform the last rights for the deceased and then the burial. Now with a cemetery to take care of, a committee would be formed to perform this duty and this was most certainly the first gathering in Potchefstroom.

Two months after the consecration of the cemetery, on 16 September 1880, twenty nine year old Harris Reuben Davis died and was laid to rest in Potchefstroom.<sup>40</sup> A tombstone was placed over Davis's grave a few months after his death. It is of interest to note that

<sup>37</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, no 300 (Register van Lisensies).

<sup>38</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom. Potchefstroom Municipality Minutes, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> TAB, MHG 0/19512 – Estate Papers of Harris Reuben Davis.

the stone, which was made in the town, came complete with a Hebrew inscription. The mason who made the stone must have had knowledge of Hebrew lettering and possibly supplied other similar stones to nearby towns.<sup>41</sup> Although the cemetery no longer exists a number of tombstones have been preserved and are the only physical reminder of an early Jewish presence in Potchefstroom.<sup>42</sup> The fact that a proper Jewish burial, and the erection of a tombstone complete with Hebrew lettering, was important to this small group of immigrants, so far from home, indicates just how they clung to their religious tradition and cultural identity. They could easily have become assimilated into the host society but made a conscious effort to gather together and recreate the Jewish traditions which they had learnt in their home towns.

Even this small group could not avoid getting caught up in the serious political problem which surrounded them. Following the annexation of the Transvaal, political dissatisfaction with the British Government increased and there was a great deal of agitation among the burghers of the Republic. Self-governance had never come about and there were many other changes, which were still awaited. Potchefstroom was a hotbed of anti-British activity and meetings were held frequently to attempt to bring an end to the occupation. The British garrison built a fort in the town and it seemed that war was inevitable. In December 1880 the Colonial Secretary met with Paul Kruger<sup>43</sup> but all attempts to prevent a war were in vain.<sup>44</sup>

On 16 December 1880 war broke out and the first shots were fired at the fort in Potchefstroom. Telegraph wires were cut and those soldiers trapped in the fort were unable to make any contact with the Cape. By New Year the Boers were in control of all of their former territory except for the two British forts in Potchefstroom and Pretoria.<sup>45</sup> The fort in Potchefstroom was besieged but the soldiers managed to hold out for just over three months. Conditions in the town became deplorable. Shopkeepers' goods were commandeered while shelling continued daily. Food was rationed and fresh water was

---

<sup>41</sup> Tombstone of H R Davis.

<sup>42</sup> Memorial Park, Potchefstroom.

<sup>43</sup> Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger (1825-1904), President of the South African Republic.

<sup>44</sup> Standard Bank Archives: Letter dated 21 Jan 1881

<sup>45</sup> Jenkins, pp. 65-77.

difficult to come by. The reinforcements who were led by Sir George Colley were routed at Majuba where Colley was killed. After ninety-five days of siege a letter of truce was sent to General Cronje and on 21 March 1881 the War ended. The British garrison left the town and the sovereignty of the Republic was restored.<sup>46</sup>

The War had placed a tremendous strain on the economy of the town and a severe recession followed. Among the business casualties was the respected firm of Hirschfield and Davis. In October 1881 it was reported that the partners had left for Kimberley where they were endeavoring to make a living.<sup>47</sup> Many others left Potchefstroom for the diamond fields and the once growing Jewish presence seemed to diminish within just a few months.<sup>48</sup> It was clear that the new immigrants had no fixed ties and could move on to other towns or cities where they saw better prospects without complications. Having left their homes in Europe and travelled vast distances to reach South Africa, travelling within the country did not seem as complicated. When first arriving in or moving to new towns immigrants tended to gravitate towards their co-religionists who could advise them on whatever opportunities existed and new customs that had to be learnt. This type of mutual assistance, which had been drawn from their religious education in their places of origin, would later play an integral role in communal development.

The economy of the Transvaal still looked rather embattled at the beginning of 1882. A report states that “trade remains completely stagnant and capital and enterprise are gradually retiring from the country and their withdrawal is hastened by the unenlightened commercial legislation and vicious fiscal policy of the Raad. Landed property is almost impossible of realization and the various concessions granted... to mining adventurers without means of character will fairly stifle and ultimately destroy the important industry....”<sup>49</sup> Military service was introduced often taking men away from their businesses and in many cases was the result of further financial ruin.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid p. 77.

<sup>47</sup> Standard Bank Archives: Inspector's Report 18 October 1881.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Standard Bank Archives: Inspector's Report Jan 1882.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

From mid-1882 a few Jews began to trickle back into the town. As before, the majority of Jewish inhabitants were storekeepers. Roadside hotels began to spring up within the district, many of which had Jewish proprietors. These were essentially trading stores, which catered to weary travellers who needed refreshment after a long journey. Sleeping quarters were usually behind the store. Inn keeping had been an age-old occupation practiced by Jews in Eastern Europe which they were able to bring with them to their new land.<sup>51</sup> Many of these roadside hotel proprietors went on to become respected hoteliers in the small towns throughout the country. By 1885 there were fifteen of these Jewish owned establishments in the Potchefstroom district. The peripatetic nature of these immigrants allowed them to successfully adapt in their adopted homes and provide services to fellow travellers whom they encountered on their way.<sup>52</sup> As more immigrants began arriving and working as *smouse* these roadside hotels were popular places to meet up with old friends, reminisce about *der Heim*,<sup>53</sup> and build new relationships with locals.

Gold was discovered in 1886 on the Witwatersrand and prospectors soon flooded into Johannesburg. Their route from the Cape often took them through Potchefstroom and it was only at this time that the town began to recover economically. The future history of Potchefstroom and the surrounding area would be intertwined with the development of the gold mining industry in South Africa. From a handful of Jewish store and hotelkeepers of the early 1880's the Jewish community rapidly increased in size. Among the newcomers were R. Wolff, the partners Jacobsohn & Kauffmann, Bernard Arenstein, Max Heimann, L. Goldberg, Herman Tobiansky, Bernard Kossuth, Hermann Salinger, Nathan Machol, Reuben Golding, Simon Frenkel, and Ludwig Eisenberg.<sup>54</sup> Most of these men opened trading stores which began to flourish in the town. These stores not only sold to the locals but also bought in farming produce which they sold to agents in other towns and cities. Bernard Arenstein bought a hotel (later called the King's), which he ran, with his family, until his death in 1926.<sup>55</sup> He was to become the son-in-law of Rev. Abraham

<sup>51</sup> D Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe 1789-1939*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 95

<sup>52</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, no 300 (Register van Lisensies).

<sup>53</sup> The Home, the place of origin of the immigrant

<sup>54</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's Reports 1888 and TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, no. 300 (Register van Lisensies)

<sup>55</sup> Potchefstroom Chevra Kadisha. Pincus (Burial List). .



Ornstein, Rabbi to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation. It was Arenstein who officiated at many Jewish ceremonies for almost twenty years until the first spiritual leader arrived in Potchefstroom in 1897.<sup>56</sup>

Most of the Jewish residents of the town are described by the manager of the Standard Bank as “respectable”, while some are referred to as being “shrewd and careful.” There was an amicable relationship between Jewish residents of the town and the wider community, yet a certain antipathy towards Jews remained. This is confirmed by a description of Jacobsohn and Kauffmann, who had £9000 in their bank account, and are referred to as “respectable Hebrews.”<sup>57</sup> However, by the very fact that they were referred to as Hebrew, rather than Germans, Englishmen, or Russian, it is apparent that Jews were perceived as different from other members of the European immigrant population. This was the beginning of a period of burgeoning anti-alienism which would later become a great obstacle for Jewish immigrants to South Africa.<sup>58</sup>

While the gold rush was under way in Potchefstroom, Jacobsohn and Kauffmann had also been prospecting in Roodepoort<sup>59</sup> and in the general area of the Witwatersrand. Together with Siegmund Hammerschlag, they were responsible for bringing the first gold crushing machinery into the country and were very successful in their prospecting endeavors. They had made a great fortune there and were considered among the wealthiest citizens of the South African Republic.<sup>60</sup>

It was rumoured in December 1886 that gold had been found on some farms very close to Potchefstroom. This news sent property prices soaring and a great trade in agricultural property began. Buyers from all over the country started arriving in Potchefstroom. One of those to take advantage of the ever increasing property prices was Sammy Marks, who had by then built the first factory in the South African Republic which produced gin and

---

<sup>56</sup> Interview Mrs. J Waks.

<sup>57</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's Report: 9 Jul 1887.

<sup>58</sup> See M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994 pp. 9-18.

<sup>59</sup> S A Rochlin, “The Early Gold-fields,” in G Saron and L Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa – A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955, p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> Rochlin, pp. 145-146.

brandy.<sup>61</sup> He had made his fortune in Kimberley and then moved on to coal mining. He also set about buying up farms and the Potchefstroom farm, which he bought in mid-December, was purchased for £250.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately this was one of those farms that did not have gold deposits, and it was sold in 1890 at a loss. Marks' one time partner, Alois Hugo Nellmapius, was also active in purchasing property in Potchefstroom with the same unfortunate result.<sup>63</sup> Nellmapius, who was born in Budapest, had a Jewish mother, but was not a practicing Jew.<sup>64</sup> Another property trading pioneer of this period was Herman Tobiansky, who soon moved to Johannesburg and developed the area later known as Sophiatown.<sup>65</sup>

The Potchefstroom Reefs had been fully explored by January 1887 when diamond magnate, Alfred Beit, purchased a farm for the exorbitant sum of £12000. The farm was situated within twelve miles of the town. With the discovery of gold in the area the town began to flourish again and as the economic situation improved the town started expanding in size in order to accommodate all of the newcomers.<sup>66</sup>

More reefs were discovered closer to Potchefstroom and as a result the economy of the area was booming. By 1889 neighbouring Klerksdorp, which was a half a days drive by wagon, established its own Hebrew congregation and many Potchefstroom Jews trekked there for religious services. The Potchefstroom community had not yet formed itself into a cohesive religious association. This was probably due to the transient nature of those residing in the town. Many Jews only spent a few months there before moving on to Kimberley or Johannesburg. Some even returned to Eastern Europe with their newly made fortunes.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> R Mendelsohn, *Sammy Marks 'The Uncrowned King of the Transvaal'*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1991, pp. 23-38

<sup>62</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 59, Landdros Transport Register van Erve, 1860-1888

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> H Kaye, *The Tycoon and the President: The Life and times of Alois Hugo Nellmapius 1847-1893*, MacMillan, Johannesburg, 1978, p. 16

<sup>65</sup> C Saunders, ed., *Illustrated History of South Africa – The Real Story*, Reader's Digest Association, Cape Town, 1988, p. 427.

<sup>66</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's Report 1887.

<sup>67</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 59, Landdros Transport Register van Erve, 1860-1888

## Chapter 2:

### The 1890's – The Foundations of a Community.

The Jews living in Potchefstroom in the 1890s were confronted by many problems, most of which they were able to surmount. Despite the ever present political strife in the country it was the poor economic situation that dominated their daily lives. The recession and intermittent short booms which gripped the town continued throughout the decade. These uncertainties gave rise to a transient society seeking to improve its lot and having constantly to relocate. Nevertheless the numbers of Jewish inhabitants of Potchefstroom increased and a solid foundation for a community was established. This would later be tested by the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War late in 1899.

Up to 1890 the majority of Jewish residents in Potchefstroom were of Anglo-German or Dutch origin. There were also some anglicized Eastern European Jews who had spent some time in England before coming out to Southern Africa. The 1890s saw a great influx of immigrants directly from Eastern Europe who brought a different value system and cultural identity with them, which they wanted to recreate in their new home. They were physically as far away from the world of the *shtetl*<sup>1</sup> as they could be, yet it remained a part of their cultural identity forever on. On closer investigation it is evident that they had emigrated from the provinces of Vilna, Kovno and Minsk, all within the Russian Pale of Settlement.<sup>2</sup> There are countless reasons why they decided to leave Russia. Paramount among them was the discrimination meted out to Jews throughout Eastern Europe. Fear of pogroms was uppermost in their consciousness following the assassination of the Czar in 1881. Military service was compulsory as the government tried to “Russify” the Jewish population. Many conscripts were never heard of again. Families were large and the enclosed area of the Pale could not support the rapidly expanding population. Economic deprivation was an important factor driving people out of Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Food was scarce and living conditions appalling.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A small town in Eastern Europe.

<sup>2</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 126, (Burgher Lists).

<sup>3</sup> M Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945*, Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1995, pp. 179-193.

The news of the discovery of gold and diamonds drew a large number of adventurous immigrants to South Africa hoping to make their fortune. It was very common for an immigrant to write home about his financial success and encourage his family to join him, often sending money for the fare. Their letters would be read to neighbours and friends and in this way the idea of leaving home would be planted in their minds. As more people left, news of successes filtered home and this process, which Shimoni describes as “chain migration,” continued to gather momentum.<sup>5</sup> None of these letters, relating to residents of Potchefstroom, have survived but the family connections of these immigrants can easily be traced throughout South Africa. Reports in Jewish newspapers covered the successes of the immigrants and painted a very bright picture of Cape Town and Johannesburg. Even though there was some negative reporting discussing the economic slump of the early 1890s, immigrants continued to journey to Southern Africa. In 1891 ND Hoffmann wrote in the Polish Hebrew Weekly, *Hatzefirah*, that the mines were no longer yielding their riches and the Jewish communities in places like Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom had dwindled to almost nothing.<sup>6</sup> However bad the situation in South Africa was, it is unlikely that it was worse than in the Pale of Settlement. Immigrants ignored warnings and continued to travel here.

The shipping lines made access to South Africa relatively easy. It is important to note that the majority of these early immigrants to South Africa were young, single men. For those who were already married, it would be a while before they could afford to bring their families out to join them. Unattached, they were able to move around quite freely and if they did not see a future in one place they could easily move on to the next. We find mention of store clerks and assistants in a number of businesses who appear in no other records and it can be concluded these men stayed only a few months or weeks before moving on to another town. It was common to begin one's trading life as a peddler or *smous* working on commission for a storekeeper in the town. Travelling to the distant

---

<sup>4</sup> US National Archives, Washington, Foster Commission, 1892.

<sup>5</sup> G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism, The South African Experience 1910-1967*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980, pp. 1-27.

<sup>6</sup> G Saron., “Boers, Uitlanders, Jews,” in G Saron and L Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa, A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955, p. 181.

farms they developed lasting relationships with the farmers and their workers and learnt of their needs and customs. It was this experience that stood them in good stead in their later commercial ventures. They also built up a vast network of contacts throughout the countryside which they could call back on at a later stage. Much bartering was done on the farms and these *smouse* often returned to town laden with skins, wool, and other produce which their general dealer backers could then sell. Many of these men opened small stores of their own, working their way up the economic ladder.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, politics was an important factor affecting life in the South African Republic during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The *Grondwet* (Constitution) placed no restriction on those entering the country, provided that they were European, and law abiding.<sup>8</sup> However there were a great number of obstacles placed in the way of the non-Protestant *Uitlander* community. The most important of their grievances was the lack of franchise, followed by high taxation, barring from military and government posts and the lack of subsidies to schools other than those run by the government.<sup>9</sup>

It must be remembered that Jews who had come from the heavily regulated and discriminatory countries of Eastern Europe, would, most probably, not have viewed the laws of the South African Republic as especially problematic. They were allowed to carry on with their everyday lives, free from physical harm and emotional distress. Despite some discriminatory laws that governed the Republic most were never put into practice. In order to become a Burgher (citizen) of the Republic a period of five years had to elapse from the time of arrival and permission to make application for naturalization. Naturalization cost £25 though this was decreased in 1890 to £5 while the waiting period increased to fourteen years.<sup>10</sup> During this period the only known Jews to have been naturalized in Potchefstroom were the brothers, Solomon and Harry Hirschman and Herman Rubenstein. Jacob Singer claimed to be a Burgher of the Republic but no

---

<sup>7</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, Misc. Business Records.

<sup>8</sup> G Saron, "Jewish Immigration 1880-1913", in G Saron and L Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa – A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Saron, pp. 179-188.

<sup>10</sup> Davenport p. 83.

evidence has been found to substantiate this claim.<sup>11</sup> On 1 May 1890 a petition listing Uitlander grievances, signed by the Jews and Catholics of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Potchefstroom, Heidelberg, and Lydenberg, was presented to the Government. No response was noted.<sup>12</sup>

The collapse of the Stock Exchange in Johannesburg in 1890 had a disastrous effect on the economy of the South African Republic and resulted in a severe recession. Mining securities were further devalued by the poor output of the Klerksdorp mines. During this period there had been much talk of a railway system being constructed in the Republic and it was felt that this would drive away business from the small towns like Potchefstroom.<sup>13</sup> A number of those Jews who had settled in Potchefstroom now saw no future in the town and moved on to Johannesburg or Kimberley where they hoped to find better prospects.<sup>14</sup> However there were those who stayed on to battle through the hard times and tried to rebuild the local economy. Notable among them was Bernard Arenstein who, being a hotelier, appears to have had a stable income. He was able to cater to the migrating population who were still flowing through the town on their journey between the Cape and Johannesburg.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that there were now only five Jewish families, out of a population of 800 in the town, religious services were held during the High Holy Days of 1890.<sup>16</sup> It must be assumed that the necessary *minyan* (quorum of ten men) was made up by visitors to the town from the outlying districts.<sup>17</sup> Holding these services, the first ever in the town, was a triumph for this small community. Despite their many hardships they

---

<sup>11</sup> TAB, CJC 336 ref CJC 1885 (Compensation Claim – Jacob Singer).

<sup>12</sup> Saron, p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> A Mabin and B Conradie, eds., *The Confidence of the Whole Country- Standard Bank Reports on Economic Conditions in Southern Africa 1865-1902*, Standard Bank Investment Corporation, Johannesburg, 1987, pp. 260-270.

<sup>14</sup> KAB, CO 8567 ref 22 (Naturalization certificate of Hyman Holzschneider) as example.

<sup>15</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 123.

<sup>16</sup> L I Rabinowitz, "The Transvaal Congregations", in G Saron and L Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa – A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> South Jewish Historical Society, *South African Jewry 1965*, p. 173. In fact, from 1965 onwards all publications relating to the establishment of the community refer to this date. The discrepancy in dates appears to have occurred due to a rivalry between the Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp congregations. Each claimed that they were the older community and from the 1960's onwards the dates are incorrectly given.

had been able to come together to perform a ritual that would have been taken for granted in their places of origin or even in the larger towns in the South Africa. This event shows their deep commitment to their religious beliefs as well as their need to replicate their traditions in their new home. Although these immigrants were so far from their homes and families, they clung to what was familiar and made every effort to reproduce the communal gatherings of their past.

Among those listed in the 1890 Inspector's Reports of the Standard Bank's Potchefstroom Branch, was storekeeper, Herman Salinger, who had property valued at £20000, security worth £11000, and a cash balance of just under £10000. According to the manager he was "doing a splendid business, chiefly with farmers." Furthermore he "carries on a branch business at Makwassie under the management of his brother – good business being done."<sup>18</sup> There were four other speculators who lived in the town of Potchefstroom and the district. One of these, Reuben Golding, was considered "respectable."<sup>19</sup> The three other Jewish clients had between £2 and £15 in the bank. Two of them, Jacob and Joseph Frankel had a store in Katdoornbosch.<sup>20</sup>

In the following year Herman Salinger was declared insolvent.<sup>21</sup> His brother Nathan was "keeping a small store at Rietfontein"<sup>22</sup> and his father-in-law, Jacob Jacobsohn, "has little or no means and is bedridden."<sup>23</sup> Another creditor was Morris Robinson who being an unrehabilitated insolvent registered his business in the name of his wife, Eva.<sup>24</sup> Herman Tobiansky had returned to Potchefstroom and was "a shrewd and careful man."<sup>25</sup> The cases of Salinger and Robinson show the relative instability of these early business enterprises in Potchefstroom. They also speak of the adaptability of these new immigrants and their ability to learn new systems. Insolvencies were frequent. It was not uncommon for merchants to move on to other towns once their businesses had failed and

---

<sup>18</sup> Standard Bank Archives, 442 Potch 1879 – pp. 5, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid pp 5, 99.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p 55.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p 89.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p 125.

begin afresh. Clearly as most of them had started out with very little they did not have much to lose. One of those who chose to relocate was Morris Robinson. He had lived in Potchefstroom for a few years and after his insolvency his business was considered “very speculative” and he did not have a “strong name” in the town. He moved to Johannesburg where he opened a new store.<sup>26</sup>

“The respectable firm” of storekeepers, Jacob, Julius, Bernard and Simon Frenkel and Co, of Johannesburg, Venterskroon, Pietersburg, and Buffelsdoorn had moved their account to De Nationale Bank, Johannesburg as the Standard Bank was “unwilling to grant unsecure overdrafts.”<sup>27</sup> Due to the poor economic climate and the bank’s unwillingness to provide funding the Frenkels soon closed their store in Potchefstroom. Their future success was due not only to the fact that they were “shrewd” businessmen but also as a result of having a brother posted at each branch of the business.<sup>28</sup> Family ties were very strong through the Jewish communities of the South African Republic. The trading network of the 1880’s had continued with great success.

During the 1890s there was only one burial in the tiny Hebrew allotment of the general cemetery. Flora, daughter of Hyman and Sarah Holzschneider, aged 1 year and 7 months, passed away at Potchefstroom on 19 December 1890. Her tombstone was ordered from Johannesburg and is today one of the few remnants of an early Jewish presence in the town.<sup>29</sup> Hyman Holzschneider came to Potchefstroom with his family from Germany and started his life in this country a *smous*, later opening his own store in the town. During the economic slump of the early nineties he moved to Johannesburg where he remained.<sup>30</sup> No further Jewish deaths are recorded in Potchefstroom until after the South African War.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Standard Bank Archives 442 Potch 1879 – p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Grave stone of Flora Holzschneider, Memorial Park, Potchefstroom.

<sup>30</sup> Family papers relating to the Holzschneider family.

<sup>31</sup> Chevra Kadisha Register, Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation. In the 1960’s this old cemetery, which had fallen into a state of disrepair, was transformed into a park. The remains of those interred were removed and a few headstones were selected for display in the park. The four headstones from the Jewish cemetery were among those and are scattered around a grassy patch in the centre. The names of some of those buried in this cemetery are also inscribed on a plaque at the park entrance.



The most significant event to take place during this decade was a gathering of Jews in the town at the house of Dr Aaron Tren where the Congregation was officially established on 5 June 1892<sup>32</sup>. A constitution was drawn up following the form of the Durban Hebrew Congregation.<sup>33</sup> The proceedings were conducted by Bernard Arenstein and each male member of the community recited a prayer. As a Synagogue would not be built for many years to come, meetings were held in private homes and when numbers began growing it is recalled that a temporary hall was procured.<sup>34</sup>

There were those in the Potchefstroom who had strayed from the Jewish faith. A lack of suitable Jewish partners forced them to look to the wider society for husbands and wives. Not all immigrants practiced the same level of observance once they left their homes and quickly became assimilated into the host community. One such example is Maurits Italianer, a Dutch Jew, from an observant family, who had come out to the Cape in 1881.<sup>35</sup> In 1889 Italianer married an Afrikaner widow named Maria Magdalena Mitchell. They settled in Potchefstroom where he had a successful bakery, having trained as a confectioner in Holland.<sup>36</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Maria became Jewish or that Italianer had links with the fledgling Jewish community of the town. While on a business trip to Boksburg, Italianer passed away. Knowing that he was of the Jewish faith his body was taken to Johannesburg and interred at the Jewish cemetery in Braamfontein.<sup>37</sup> The first known photograph of a Potchefstroom Jew is that of Italianer.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Very little biographical information exists relating to Dr Aaron Tren, sometimes called Trenn. From 1894 until after the South African War he was District Surgeon at Vryheid.

<sup>33</sup> *London Jewish Chronicle*, undated handwritten extract.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mrs. J Waks

<sup>35</sup> Passenger list of the RMS Roman from Plymouth and Madeira arriving at Cape Town on 12 September 1881. Passengers M Italianer disembarked at Algoa Bay while W Karlis disembarked at East London. Wolf Carlis (also Karlis) was later to play an important role in Potchefstroom.

<sup>36</sup> TAB, M7443, Magistrate Klerksdorp, Marriage Register. 16 January 1889 – Maurice Italianer, born 1859 in Arnhem, Holland, married Maria Magdalena Mitchell, born Kruger, in 1865 in Zeerust.

<sup>37</sup> Johannesburg Chevra Kadisha, Braamfontein Cemetery Register.

<sup>38</sup> TAB, MHG 0/7402, Estate File – Maurits Italianer. When Italianer's family in Holland heard of his passing they laid claim to the tiny estate which he had left. Not knowing that he had married they believed themselves to be the sole heirs to the estate. Both the Dutch family and his widow had to prove their right to inherit the belongings of the late Italianer. The sisters in Holland sent out a collection of certificates proving their relationship as well as a photograph of their brother sent to them from South Africa many years before. Maria presented her marriage certificate together with a photograph of herself and her husband. Woolf Carlis, then living in Klerksdorp, confirmed that he had known of the marriage. Maria was

Another example of assimilation during this period is that of Abigail Schultz who died in Potchefstroom in 1894 and was buried beside her husband in the Christian cemetery.<sup>39</sup> Schultz, a descendant of the Norden family, that came to the Cape from England in the 1820s, was born in Grahamstown in 1841.<sup>40</sup> She married Robert Murray in the Eastern Cape and they settled in Potchefstroom where he died in 1886.<sup>41</sup> In 1889 she married a German hotelier, nine years her junior, named August Schultz<sup>42</sup> and they adopted a ten year old child, Charlie Jacobs.<sup>43</sup> During this period Schultz maintained contact with her family who were members of various Jewish communities in the Cape and appear to have been tolerant of her husband. It is not clear whether Schultz ever converted to Christianity and there is no mention in her Will of how she wanted to be buried. Her tombstone and that of husband have not survived.<sup>44</sup> It appears that many descendants of the early Jewish settlers to South Africa either converted to Christianity or married out of their faith. The fact that they were still remembered in family wills of those who remained Jewish indicates that this was an accepted part of early colonial Jewish life among the Anglo-German immigrants. Whereas many Eastern European immigrants went as far as severing ties with relatives who married Christians, many of the Anglo-Germans were more accepting of this inevitable outcome.

By the end of 1892 the recession began lifting but Potchefstroom remained “in a very desperate condition, although there are some indications of improvement in the value of local farms.”<sup>45</sup> Speculators had again been buying up farming property in the hope that gold deposits would be found thus causing the increase in the price of land. As the decade

---

then declared sole heir of the estate totaling no more than £50. Although the two photographs are no longer in the Estate file, they were copied by microfilm.

<sup>39</sup> Potchefstroom Chevra Kadisha, Cemetery Register.

<sup>40</sup> P Cheifitz, *A History of the Jews in Dordrecht*, Cape Town, 1997. Abigail Moss was the granddaughter of Marcus Norden of Grahamstown and great niece of Benjamin Norden. Her parents separated when she was young and she lived with her father, Samuel Moss, in the Eastern Cape. Moss followed a religious way of life, as did his other children.

<sup>41</sup> KAB CO 4531. Marriage certificate of Abigail Moss to Robert C D Murray dated Middelburg, Cape 2 August 1871.

<sup>42</sup> TAB, M7443. Marriage certificate of Abby Moss, the widow Murray, aged 48, born in the Cape and August Paul Schultz, aged 39, born in Germany, dated Potchefstroom 11 February 1889.

<sup>43</sup> TAB, MHG 0/9435, Estate File, Abey Moss

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Mabin and Conradie p. 329.

wore on the outlook for the town became increasingly favorable if only for the business carried on at the nearby mines. Although this activity was focused around Klerksdorp much of the trade passed through Potchefstroom and business improved as a result. However another economic slump followed in 1894. Nonetheless residents were heartened by the news that a railway line was being surveyed which would link the town with Krugersdorp on the main line to Pretoria. This would surely be an economic boost but would still take a number of years before completion.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the precarious economic situation immigrants from Eastern Europe began flowing back into the town. In 1894 we find a list of twenty Jewish men, between the ages of 18 and 35, residing in Potchefstroom. All of them originated in Eastern Europe and seem to have spent time in other towns in the Transvaal prior to arriving in Potchefstroom. One of them had listed his former place of residence as Johannesburg. Among them were five shopkeepers, three hotelkeepers, two tailors, two clerks, a watchmaker, a canteen proprietor, a day worker, a violin stringer, and four who were unemployed. The references to shop and hotel keepers are undefined and it is probable that a number of them had their stores and hotels in the outlying districts rather than the town itself. Hotels varied in size and quality. Bernard Arenstein's hotel in the town was a smart establishment with well fitted rooms, including bathrooms, while the others were roadside hotels with fewer amenities. Clerks worked for shopkeepers whose businesses were too large to be managed by just one person. The canteen proprietor would have operated a mine canteen and served the food to the miners. The number of unemployed confirms the economic crisis in the area. Only half of those on the list remained in the town for more than a year.<sup>47</sup>

By the middle of the decade political debate between Britain and the Kruger government had all but broken down.<sup>48</sup> Plans were afoot for a coup d'état. Dr Jameson<sup>49</sup>, in collusion with a number of important mining magnates, known as the Reform Committee, was to

---

<sup>46</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 207-209.

<sup>47</sup> Argief Potchefstroom, No. 123. Landdros Register van Burghers en Inwoners 1894-1899.

<sup>48</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 207-209.

<sup>49</sup> Sir Leander Starr Jameson (1853-1917), a British medical doctor and later statesman, was the main instigator of the raid which bears his name.

lead the invasion of the Transvaal from Bechuanaland, a British Protectorate, focusing their energies on Johannesburg. At the same time the British High Commissioner would proceed to Johannesburg from the Cape and declare the country a British sovereign state. On 30 December 1895 the plan was put into action and Jameson marched into the South African Republic, having failed to receive the news that the raid had been postponed. On 2 January 1896 Jameson and his men were routed by the Potchefstroom Commando led by General Cronje.<sup>50</sup> Forced to surrender, Jameson and the Reform Committee were charged with High Treason and sentenced to death. The sentences were later commuted.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the political disruptions, commercial activities continued as usual and in 1896 the manager of the Standard Bank in Potchefstroom reported that the town was making “remarkable progress” and “trade continues to increase.”<sup>52</sup> The influx of Eastern European immigrants continued but while they were bolstering the numbers of the fledgling Jewish community, others continued to leave for Johannesburg. There were now thirty five Jewish male residents in the town, ten of whom had been there two years previously. Their ages range between seventeen and forty and it is estimated that between six and ten had wives and families living with them. The remainder were single. Among them were six shopkeepers, five clerks, two hoteliers, an official, a canteen proprietor, an employee of the Nederlandsche Bank, a proprietor of the Best Union Bar, a barman, a painter, a tailor, a violin stringer, a billiard maker, and six who were unemployed. It is clear that there was a diverse selection of entertainment becoming available, music and gaming among the most welcome pastimes. Three of these men were of Dutch origin while the rest were Eastern European.<sup>53</sup> Those who had lived in the town for six years or more were Bernard Arenstein, Adolph Konigsberg and Israel Kohn. The majority of the others were newcomers who had been there for between two years and 2 months.<sup>54</sup> There is no reference to women in the records. As wives and daughters their status was dependant on their husbands and fathers. No evidence of single unaccompanied Jewish women exists during this period of Potchefstroom’s history.

<sup>50</sup> Potchefstroom – The Town Council Pamphlet, 1951

<sup>51</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 207-209.

<sup>52</sup> Mabin and Conradie pp. 394, 408.

<sup>53</sup> Argief Potchefstroom, No. 123, Landdros Register 1896-1897.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Towards the last half of 1897 it was reported that Potchefstroom “is gradually recovering from the severe depression of the last few years.”<sup>55</sup> Once again, this uplifting news was to be short lived. The following year we learn from Standard Bank reports that “our Manager is of the opinion that the depression is more severely felt than in any other district in the Transvaal.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore the “position of farmers is deplorable”<sup>57</sup> while “mining in every respect is dormant and general stagnation prevails.”<sup>58</sup>

The railway finally reached the town connecting it to Pretoria and Johannesburg via Krugersdorp on 3 August 1897.<sup>59</sup> The railway link opened up Potchefstroom to the rest of the country making it more easily accessible to travellers. It was now possible to move goods at a faster rate and bring a wider variety of supplies into the town. Although the economic benefits of the railway were not immediate, the long term effects would be very positive.

The new railway brought the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation its first minister, the Rev. Plotkin, in 1897. With the fast growing Jewish community the services of a religious leader was imperative. Not only was it a country Reverend’s job to preach to the community, conduct services and perform all the necessary rites to do with lifecycle events, but he was also responsible for the slaughtering and preparing of *Kosher* meat. Teaching the children of the community was also an important part of his role. Classes would be given after school in Hebrew and religious studies as well as *Bar Mitzvah* preparation. He would also have to represent the community to the public at large. Each of these functions would have been performed by a separate person in large towns, but in the country communities these Reverends had to be skilled in all of the above tasks.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Mabin and Conradie p. 419.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid p. 451.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Mabin and Conradie p. 456.

<sup>59</sup> Mabin and Conradie p. 417.

<sup>60</sup> R Mendelsohn and M Shain, *The Jews in South Africa, an Illustrated History*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2008, pp.94-95.

The last Residents' List drawn up by the Potchefstroom Landdros, together with the Civil Commissioner's Register of Licenses, show forty-six Jewish male residents during the period 1898-1899.<sup>66</sup> Although it is known that there were Jewish women in the town, wives and daughters of those on the lists, none of them are mentioned in official sources. We are shown that six of the original Jewish residents of the town have remained while the rest are relative newcomers. The majority of those who appeared on the previous lists are recorded as having moved on to Johannesburg where later documents refer to them.<sup>67</sup> Among the list are fifteen shopkeepers, nine hoteliers, three clerks, three canteen proprietors, two barmen, a butcher, a shoemaker, a painter, a photographer, a peddler, a musical band master, a tailor, a Rabbi and two unemployed men. Five of the occupations listed are illegible. Clearly this was a very diverse group of people. The photographer, Joseph Nurick, aged 25, travelled round the district plying his trade though there are no extant examples of his work. The town must have had a full time band in order to have employed Solomon Sandler, aged 29 as its leader. Those who are listed as unemployed are between the ages of 44 and 50 and may have been retired. The age of immigrants had increased and those represented are between 21 and 56 with the majority in their late twenties to mid-thirties.<sup>68</sup> The last inspection report of the Standard Bank prior to the outbreak of hostilities introduced one Joseph Braun, a "respectable" merchant who arrived in Potchefstroom from Lydenburg.<sup>69</sup> Morris Robinson had returned to the town after a business failure in Johannesburg and is described as "energetic but unscrupulous and in difficulties."<sup>70</sup> Working for Robinson is Samuel F Cohen, an "industrious young man."<sup>71</sup>

The Civil Commissioner's Register of Licenses 1898-1899 gives a clear picture of Jewish commercial activity in the Potchefstroom district. None of those living in the rural areas were farmers but rather store and hotel keepers, and peddlers. Jacob Block and Abel Wilkoff were peddlers while L Levenstein was storekeeper at Patrolitsfontein as well as a

<sup>66</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom. Landdros Register van Inwoners Dorp Potchefstroom 1898-1899 and Siviele Komissaris Register van Lisensies 1898-1899.

<sup>67</sup> NAAIRS database.

<sup>68</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 123, Landdros Register van Inwoners Dorp Potchefstroom 1898-1899

<sup>69</sup> Standard Bank Archives 442 Potch 1879 – p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid p. 8.

In all the records for this period we find only three farms owned by Jews in the Potchefstroom District. These were De Beers Kraal owned by the Hirschmann brothers and Zandpan and Doornplaat purchased by Wolf Carlis and his wife Kate. These transactions took place in 1899 and since none of these farms were occupied by its owners, it is assumed that they were bought for the purpose of investment.<sup>76</sup>

Of all those Jewish resident in Potchefstroom very few advertised their businesses to the wider South African public. In *Longlands Johannesburg and District Directory for 1897* of the four large hotels in the town only one, The Transvaal Hotel, was run by I Cohen. Jacob Singer and J Morris were tailors and outfitters while Wernick, Cohen & Co. advertised their restaurant, The Royal Café.<sup>77</sup> Business was clearly localized within these small communities. It is probable that hotels and restaurants relied on recommendations from former guests rather than advertising.

Although local Jews were primarily focused on building a new life for themselves in the South African Republic, they clearly remained in touch with events that were occurring throughout the greater Jewish world. In 1897 they learned of First Zionist Congress held in Basle<sup>78</sup> under the chairmanship of Theodor Herzl.<sup>79</sup> Many of the Eastern European immigrants who came to South Africa had been members of Zionist Groups in their home towns and shared Herzl's fervent dream to rebuild the Jewish Homeland in Palestine. This dream was at the core of their religious and political identity that they had brought with to Potchefstroom. A few months after the Basle Conference, the Transvaal Zionist Association was founded in Johannesburg. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1898 *The Jewish Chronicle* of London reported that "Large and enthusiastic meetings have been held at Roodepoort, Randfontein and Potchefstroom, in connection with the Zionist movement, and at all these places it was resolved to work with the central body in Johannesburg."<sup>80</sup> The Potchefstroom society was called the Chovevi Zion later changing its name to the

<sup>76</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom. No. 126 Landdros Plaas Register.

<sup>77</sup> Longlands Johannesburg and District Directory 1894-1897.

<sup>78</sup> G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980, p 19.

<sup>79</sup> Theodore Herzl (1860-1904) was a Hungarian lawyer and journalist, and the founder of the Zionist Movement.

<sup>80</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle* 13 May 1898, p. 26.

Potchefstroom Zionist Society.<sup>81</sup> The society served two primary functions for the community. Firstly it was a place where members could keep in touch with happenings in the broader Jewish world and particularly with regard to Herzl's progress. Secondly it provided a social gathering place where people with common ideas and beliefs could congregate in a non-religious setting. Regular entertainment was lacking in the small country towns and with the formation of this society the community created a platform for engaging members in discussion and debate which appealed to the very core of their identity.

Later in 1898 it was reported that "both at Middelburg and at Potchefstroom there were Jewish services on the holidays."<sup>82</sup> The congregation had grown quite substantially since its humble beginnings six years previously. Now that it had a Rabbi and sufficient funding, a stand was bought in Du Plooy Street where the Synagogue was to be erected. Bernard Arenstein, the earliest Jewish resident to have remained in the town, together with Harry Hirschmann, had worked tirelessly collecting funds for the building of the Synagogue. It was not until 1902 that the Synagogue was officially opened, building work having been interrupted by the South African War.<sup>83</sup>

On the eve of the War there were about 75 Jews living in Potchefstroom with a growing economic base. Their religious infrastructure was beginning to take shape. As the gold output of the South African Republic continued increasing the British government became intent on annexing the area. Since Kruger was unwilling to give up power without a fight, war seemed inevitable.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> M Gitlin., *The Vision Amazing – The Story of South African Zionism*, The Menorah Book Club, Johannesburg, 1950, pp. 14-27 and Rabinowitz, p. 174.

<sup>82</sup> *The Standard and Diggers' News* 28 September 1898.

<sup>83</sup> Undated Article.

<sup>84</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 206-223.



### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Potchefstroom and the South African War 1899-1902.**

The last year of the nineteenth century was a very precarious time to be an Uitlander in the South African Republic. War was looming and there were no guarantees as to how foreigners would be treated. It was as equally complicated to decide to leave as it was to remain. Those Jews who did remain in Potchefstroom would be accused of divided loyalty and despite trying to get on with their daily activities many were drawn into the hostilities. It is a testament to their forbearance that they were able to maintain their communal activities throughout the War as well as some semblance of commercial life.

By the middle of 1899 the Jewish community of Potchefstroom numbered between seventy and eighty, most of whom were single men, though there were a small number of families. Half of these were resident in the town, while the remainder lived in the outlying districts where they ran roadside hotels and trading stores.<sup>1</sup> Ninety-five percent were members of the Uitlander population while the rest had obtained Burgher rights. Although the political news was cause for concern, daily life in the town and district continued as usual. Stores remained open to trade while their owners and clerks travelled through the countryside buying and selling produce and supplies.<sup>2</sup> It was clear that a change was imminent but war was not yet the definite outcome.

With the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference in May 1899, which had tried to promote a peaceful outcome between the Boer Republics and the British, their relationship became ever more fragile.<sup>3</sup> Residents of the cities, towns and country districts of the South African Republic were naturally concerned about the worsening political climate. Many Uitlanders began selling up their possessions and property, or handing them over to trusted friends, and departed for the coast. There they hoped they would be able to see out any hostilities and soon return to their homes.<sup>4</sup> There were those,

---

<sup>1</sup> TAB, Argief Potchefstroom, No. 126 - Landdros Register.

<sup>2</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz).

<sup>3</sup> B Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, Arnold Publishers, London, 1999, p. 34

<sup>4</sup> E Bradlow, "Jewish Refugees at the Cape in the Anglo Boer War" in *Jewish Affairs*, Spring 1999

Jewish burghers among them, who strongly supported the government and its right to self determination. Others had no place to run to and too much to lose by leaving their property behind. A number among this group were clearly pro-British and hoped for a speedy occupation and end to hostilities.<sup>5</sup>

The building of the Synagogue had almost reached completion by the time that the second Rabbi, Salmann Notel Zitron, arrived in September 1899.<sup>6</sup> The secretary of the Congregation, Nathan Levy, a canteen keeper, had been a resident for three years.<sup>7</sup> Like all other religious groups in the town, services and communal activities carried on as usual, with the congregation hoping for peace.

On 18 September 1899, Nathan Levy, on behalf of the Jewish community of Potchefstroom, addressed a letter to the acting Veldkornet, C.M. Douthwait, stating that:

With an eye on the unsettled political situation in the country, I wish to bring to your attention, on behalf the of the Jewish community of the town of Potchefstroom, to a public meeting that was held on Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> in the Jewish Synagogue here, where it was resolved that in the event of hostilities taking place (God forbid), that as Uitlanders we support your cause and pray that you will maintain your freedom, and we will do out utmost to endeavor to assist you, while maintaining our civil rights. I am your honorable servant, N. N. Levy.<sup>8</sup>

There are no communal records covering this period in the history of the Jewish community of Potchefstroom, and no diaries or personal recollections have come to light. It is fortunate to have a collection of documents relating to the South African War, and specifically to a number of Jews who were living in Potchefstroom and the district during

---

<sup>5</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1446 (Compensation Claim: Boner, Tenenbaum and Starfield); TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun); TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1458 (Compensation Claim: Bernard Brown), etc.

<sup>6</sup> TAB. Argief Potchefstroom, No 126 – Landdros Register.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> TAB. KGO, CR 6914/99

this time. The source of these records are compensation claims submitted to the Central Judicial Commission by twenty two Jewish inhabitants between 1901 and 1903. They were claiming compensation from the British authorities for property lost during the War. Among the many financial statements are personal accounts of the activities of these individuals before, during, and after the War. There are accounts of witnesses and police agents who knew or followed their movements. Lastly we see the opinions of government officials towards this group.

Before discussing these files any further, it must be explained that the documents themselves are problematic. Created by the British government there was a clear bent on the part of officials to deny as many claims as possible. Their antipathy towards Jewish claimants and in some cases outright antisemitic sentiments are palpable. On the other hand those who claimed compensation tried to portray themselves in a positive light and often did not admit to anti-British activity. Taking all of the above into account, we are left with a truly fascinating picture of life in the area. Events can be traced that affected the town and its population together with personal interaction between members of the Jewish community and their hosts.<sup>9</sup>

Of the twenty two men, who were resident in the district in October 1899, eight lived in the town of Potchefstroom while the remaining fourteen were situated on farms. The vast majority were storekeepers, while there was a Rabbi, a tailor, and two hotel keepers among them. A number of the storekeepers were also *smouse* travelling around the district. Three of these men had families. All of them came from Eastern Europe. While

---

<sup>9</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz); TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1423 (Compensation Claim: Falk Bengis); TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1446 (Compensation Claim: Boner, Tenenbaum and Starfield); TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun); TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1458 (Compensation Claim: Bernard Brown); TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1461 (Compensation Claim: Wolf Carlis); TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1462 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Carolinski); TAB, CJC 312 ref CJC 1505 (Compensation Claim: Joshua Mizrachi East); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1588 (Compensation Claim: Lazarus Heimann); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1593 (Compensation Claim: Hirsch Herr and Kalman Folb); TAB, CJC 325 ref CJC 1714 (Compensation Claim: Osche Levy); TAB, CJC 329 ref CJC 1775 (Compensation Claim: Solomon Milner); TAB, CJC 329 ref CJC 1785 (Compensation Claim: Isaac Nathanson); TAB, CJC 1034 ref CJC 2022 (Compensation Claim: Herman Rubenstein); TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr); TAB, CJC 336, ref CJC 1885 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Singer).

some had been in the district for up to a decade others were new arrivals again showing the transient nature of the community.<sup>10</sup>

As the political situation deteriorated the stream of Uitlanders flowing out of the Boer Republics turned into a flood. With Cape Town as the main destination other coastal towns also saw an influx of refugees.<sup>11</sup> Potchefstroom was no exception and by the beginning of October 1899 half of the Jewish population had left the town. Most made for Cape Town where they settled in the inner city area known as District Six. They travelled by whatever means available taking with them as much as they could carry. K. Herman and Charles Tenenbaum were among these refugees. As all of their capital was invested in their stores, they reached Cape Town destitute. Both went in search for work which was scarce due to the great influx of refugees.<sup>12</sup>

Among those who left for Europe was Jacob Singer, a tailor, and long time resident of the town. He took an inventory of his belongings, locked up his store and handed the keys to C S Slade, accountant of the Nationale Bank der Zuid Afrikansche Republiek Beperkt. Singer left Potchefstroom with his family and proceeded directly to Europe where his parents had been living since leaving Eastern Europe in 1877. The Singers travelled around the Continent for some months before returning to Cape Town. Being a military tailor, Singer had no trouble finding work in Cape Town where he lived in the Gardens with his family before returning to Potchefstroom.<sup>13</sup>

Hirsch Herr and Kalman Folb also locked up their store in the town and made for the coast. Herr reached Cape Town and found refuge with friends in District Six where he would see out the War. Folb took whatever savings he had and bought a ticket on the first ship leaving for England and then went on to his family in Eastern Europe. He had left his wife and children hoping to make enough money to eventually bring them out to South Africa. Sending money home at the end of each month they had not yet saved up

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Bradlow

<sup>12</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1446 (Compensation Claim: Boner, Tenenbaum and Starfield); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman).

<sup>13</sup> TAB, CJC 336, ref CJC 1885 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Singer).

enough for the ticket to Cape Town. Folb remained with his family for the duration of the War only returning to Potchefstroom in June 1903.<sup>14</sup>

Those who did not leave for the Cape became embroiled in a fierce battle for survival. At the failure of negotiations between the Boers and the British, the South African War broke out on 11 October 1899. With the commando system in place close to three thousand burghers were called up in Potchefstroom. Among the group were seven Jews: Samuel Bach, Sunday Davidson, Harry and Solomon Hirschman, Reuven and Samuel Meirowitz, and Herman Rubinstein.<sup>15</sup> While the Hirschman brothers remained at their stores the others saw active duty under Commandant Cronje. The first objective of the Potchefstroom Commando was Mafeking where they remained for over a month while encircling the town. By the end of October they had moved on to Magersfontein and split up into smaller groups returning home on occasion and then went back into battle.<sup>16</sup> These Jews were loyal to their adoptive home and clearly believed in the principles for which they were fighting.

During the first few months of War trading with the Boers continued. The Hirschmann brothers did a very good business while others had goods requisitioned by the commandos for which they were given no remuneration. Jacob Carolinsky, a storekeeper of Leeuwfontein, whose partner was a burgher on commando named David Abraham Lurie, was very pro-British. The commandos continuously looted his store and he was nearly ruined as a result.<sup>17</sup> The Jewish war-time residents of Potchefstroom threw in their lot with the rest of the community.

An Indian storekeeper named Hasaan Fakier, was among those of the Uitlanders expelled from the town. Fakier had a small store in the centre of the town and traded with Jewish merchants among others. He gave over his goods to Rev. East who had come in from Klerksdorp. East took over the store and began trading in perishables: mealies, forage,

<sup>14</sup> TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 15939 (Compensation Claim: Hirsch Herr and Kalman Folb).

<sup>15</sup> SAJBD Archives. Rabinowitz Lists of Jews who served in the forces of the Boers during the War (1899-1902). Albert Joshua Zinn is mentioned in this list but he was German rather than Jewish.

<sup>16</sup> Jenkins pp. 82-84.

<sup>17</sup> TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1462 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Carolinski).

seed oats, and some clothing. This is one of the very few cases that can be found where a business was actually started during the War. Most were being abandoned rather than established at this time. These actions were later frowned upon and considered profiteering by the authorities. After a few months East packed up his belongings and returned with them to Klerksdorp where he continued trading.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly there was trade and interaction between the Indian and Jewish communities of the town at this time. East must have been a trusted friend for Fakier to hand over his store to him. The records show that they remained in contact during the war. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1900 the British army, under General Frederick Roberts<sup>19</sup>, entered Johannesburg and the following day Pretoria fell.<sup>20</sup> As the British gained ground the Boers changed their tactics and guerilla warfare replaced conventional battle. The Boers began wrecking train lines, cutting telegraph wires and plundering stores. Jewish traders became involved simply because of their presence within the theatre of war. The situation in Potchefstroom remained tense and the town was on constant alert should an attack be imminent. Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz had a store on the farm Kaalfontein, on the road between Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp, which became a point of rendezvous for the commandos of Wolmarans, Douthwait and van den Berg. The partners were trading successfully with the commandos until May 1900 when much of their stock was plundered.<sup>21</sup> Wulf Herman had a similar experience. He supplied whoever came to his store and did not differentiate between Boer and Brit. Soon his supplies were plundered and he was left with nothing. He was also caught by commandos on several occasions when travelling between his store at Kaalplaats and Potchefstroom to replenish his supplies. Each time he returned to his store empty handed.<sup>22</sup>

A month after the fall of Johannesburg and Pretoria General Sir Ian Hunter, accompanied by the Imperial Light Horse and the Kimberley Mounted Corps entered Ventersdorp.

---

<sup>18</sup> TAB, CJC 312 ref CJC 1505 (Compensation Claim: Joshua Mizrachi East).

<sup>19</sup> General Frederick Sleight Roberts (1832-1914), later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Roberts, was in command of the British troops in South Africa.

<sup>20</sup> Davenport p. 192.

<sup>21</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz).

<sup>22</sup> TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman).

Four days later on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, Potchefstroom was forced to surrender and the occupation of Klerksdorp followed three days later. It was reported that:

Colonel Mahon marched from Ventersdorp via Frederickstad, 40 miles, in 19 hours, with mule transport, and occupied Potchefstroom...unopposed. Colonel Mahon's movement in advance of General Hunter to Lichtenburg and Ventersdorp appears to have been sufficient for the Boer Commando at Potchefstroom, which fled on hearing of it. His reception by the British inhabitants was enthusiastic. The local Boers began surrendering their arms as soon as the Provost Marshall was ready to receive them. Eight locomotives and 100 carriages and trucks, besides a quantity of supplies, have fallen into our possession. The Landdrost escaped, and is being pursued by a party of citizens.<sup>23</sup>

The Royal Scots Fusiliers entered Potchefstroom and hoisted the Union Jack above the Landdrost Offices. This triumph for the British brought back memories of the Siege of Potchefstroom during the First Anglo Boer War in 1880-81. The Potchefstroom district, which extended from North of the Vaal, to Losberg, Gatsrand, Krugersdorp, Ventersdorp, and Klerksdorp was now under the command of Major General Hart, with the garrison commanded by General Sir Ian Hunter.

As soon as the British arrived in the town, residents were required to sign an Oath of Neutrality. Among those who signed the oath were Wulf Herman, Jacob Carolinsky, Jacob Beckman, Samuel Katz, Falk Bengis, and Osche Levy. Because they were neutral, any contact with the enemy, especially supplying them with provisions was considered an offence. Travel between the town and district was permitted, provided the traveller received a pass from the relevant authority. Throughout this period the Boer commandos continued to operate in the area, hiding wherever they could, plundering and stealing stock, and destroying anything that might assist the British with their occupation.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 23 June 1900.

<sup>24</sup> TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman); TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1462 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Carolinski); TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob

One of those who broke the Oath of Neutrality was Joseph Aaron Braude Braun. He came to the South African Republic from Wendzjagol in Russia in 1887. Eventually settling at Haartebeestfontein, he opened a store trading with local farmers. It was reported that during the beginning of the war he was “employed as part of the Burgher Forces and was armed and was engaged in guarding British Prisoners in the Boer Laager.”<sup>25</sup> In June 1900 he was captured by the British and deported to Russia while his family remained at Haartebeestfontein. His wife, Bertha, had a brother on commando and clearly did not feel secure at the store. She soon closed up the store and left for Cape Town. By the end of 1901 Braun returned from Russia and joined his family in Cape Town. Unable to find employment and desperate for money, he tried his hand at a number of menial jobs at which he did not succeed. Believing that he would never regain his livelihood and that he was ruined financially, he committed suicide leaving his family to fend for themselves.<sup>26</sup> As was the custom at the time, Braun was buried on the boundary of the cemetery in an area reserved for unnatural deaths. There are three similar cases of Jewish refugees taking their lives in Cape Town at the very same time.<sup>27</sup> Although most of the Jews displaced and ruined by the war were able to cope with their new situation, there were clearly those who could not. With injured pride, and living in extreme poverty it is easy to see how they felt there was no other way out for themselves and their families. The tragic consequences of these suicides would be felt within these families for decades to come.<sup>28</sup>

Ten days after the British occupation of Potchefstroom, Rev. East, clearly loyal to the Crown, then back in Klerksdorp, was approached by a “boer” with whom he “entered into a conversation about the war”. In an attempt to prove his loyalty, East later reported that:

---

Beckman and Samuel Katz); TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1423 (Compensation Claim: Falk Bengis); TAB, CJC 325 ref CJC 1714 (Compensation Claim: Osche Levy).

<sup>25</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun).

<sup>26</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun). Joseph Aaron Braude Braun died on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1902. The cause of death is listed as suicide by hanging.

<sup>27</sup> Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Burial Register, 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Cemetery.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ken Braun.



gradually he [the Boer] took me in his confidence. He said he had something important to tell me, but should I reveal same then death will be my punishment. He then told me that he belongs to de Wet's commando and that de Wet is crossing the Vaal River to attack Potchefstroom and to prevent the soldiers here (Klerksdorp) from joining the Potchefstroom garrison. He has been sent to destroy the line between here and Potchefstroom, also that a body of Boer Horsemen would be ready to fire on the occupants of the derailed train. He showed me the dynamite as the destructive force for the line. It has been rumored in the Town that the soldiers have been wired for, and carriages have been put in readiness for them to entrain for Potchefstroom. As a minister I felt my position acutely. To reveal this secret would be to forfeit the trust which this man has reposed in me, also certain death; not to reveal same it would have meant certain death to a multitude of innocent men who I could have saved from a diabolic death trap. I have therefore resolved to risk my own life for the sake of humanity, trusting to God that he (sic) will help me. I have therefore sent for Mr. W Carlis, a member from my congregation, who has been then a government contractor. I told him to tell Captain Lambart who was commander in Klerksdorp, to protect the line. Fortunately Captain Lambart acted promptly. He and Lieut. Blagden and Mr. Carlis took a special engine and captured van Wyk at his brother's house at No. 2 Cottage on the line. He confessed his guilt and has been sent to Potchefstroom prison.<sup>29</sup>

East took great pride in having saved the lives of these soldiers and the town of Potchefstroom. He was neither thanked by the authorities nor acknowledged for his actions.<sup>30</sup>

Although the town of Potchefstroom remained under British occupation the district was constantly under attack from Boer commandos. Osche Levy, who had a store and hotel at Frederickstad, in partnership with his brother, Benjamin, stated that "at the beginning of

---

<sup>29</sup> TAB, CJC 312 ref CJC 1505 (Compensation Claim: Joshua Mizrachi East). Letter sent to Lord Kitchener dated 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1900.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

July last my brother and I heard that the Boers were all about Frederickstad and fearing that we might be forced by them to break our Oath of Neutrality we applied to the Military authorities here for permission to come to Potchefstroom which permission we obtained....That when we left Frederickstad we had to leave behind our store and hotel under one roof also one stable with furniture, stock and goods to the value of about £50.”<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Levy returned “home to Russia” while his brother remained in Potchefstroom hoping to return to Frederickstad to survey the damage.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time Lazarus Heimann, a “Jew” storekeeper from Kaalfontein, has his stock commandeered by General Liebenberg’s commando in July 1900. In August, while being watched by British intelligence agents it was noted that Heimann was carrying dispatches through the lines and he was arrested by General Douglas at Krugersdorp. Heimann was sent as a Prisoner of War to Johannesburg and then to the camp in Greenpoint, Cape Town, where he spent nine months. After escaping from the camp while still being classed a Prisoner of War, Heimann somehow returned to Kaalfontein and Potchefstroom where he was rearrested for “breaking town and camp regulations.” This time he was deported as an “undesirable” to Natal where he obtained the position of postmaster at the Table Mountain Mission Station. Heimann died there in March 1904 at the age of twenty five. The Resident Magistrate who dealt with him on numerous occasions in Potchefstroom described him as a “poisonous little reptile.”<sup>33</sup> Comments like these, together with constant references to either “Jew storekeepers” or “Hebrew hotel keepers” lead to the conclusion that British officials who were administering the town were negatively disposed to Jews, and as will later become clear, went out of their way to deny them compensation for their losses.<sup>34</sup> This type of anti-alien feeling was very common among the British forces.<sup>35</sup>

The “scorched earth policy” was instituted by the British in the Potchefstroom district in August 1900. Farms houses and produce were burned in an attempt to starve out the Boer

<sup>31</sup> TAB, CJC 325 ref CJC 1714 (Compensation Claim: Osche Levy). Statement dated 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1588 (Compensation Claim: Lazarus Heimann).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, pp. 44-48.

insurgents. The whole of Frederickstad was raised to the ground. Boers had been found hiding in the two empty stores owned by Jews. Osche Levy who had been in Potchefstroom for some months heard that his store and hotel had been burnt by Lord Methuen's column but due to restrictions on travel he was not allowed to inspect the damage. Like many of those in his situation, he had lost everything. Not only was his home destroyed but everything in it including all personal possessions.<sup>36</sup>

As the British forces conducted sweeps to try and rout out the Boer insurgents they commandeered an ever growing amount of supplies from the store keepers in the district leaving them with very little stock in trade. On 9 August 1900 Lieutenant Bailey passed the store of the partners Sherr and Shakinovsky taking with him 1500 bundles of forage.<sup>37</sup> Later that month Wulf Herman's store was visited by the British army who took with them, 9000 bundles of forage, 135 fowls, 39 ducks, 10 turkeys and a horse.<sup>38</sup> Once items had been taken, storeowners had to go to the nearest military encampment to get receipts for their goods. They then had to locate the soldiers who were at their stores and persuade them to attest to those items taken. It was a very drawn out bureaucratic process and a number of storekeepers were unable to leave their premises and thus never received any proof of goods taken.<sup>39</sup>

In September 1900, after almost a year of battle, Roberts proclaimed British sovereignty over the Transvaal.<sup>40</sup> The War was far from over and the guerilla tactics of the Boers were damaging the morale of the British soldiers who were untrained to deal with this type of warfare. With Boer men away on commando, their women, children and farm workers were rounded up and placed in concentration camps where conditions were horrific and the mortality rate extremely high. Men who were eventually captured were placed in jail and later sent out of the country. Farms were plundered and whatever was of use to the army was requisitioned. Homes were dismantled, the wood being used for

---

<sup>36</sup> TAB, CJC 325 ref CJC 1714 (Compensation Claim: Osche Levy).

<sup>37</sup> TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman).

<sup>40</sup> B Nasson, *The South African War 1899-1902*, Arnold Publishers, London, 1999, pp. 189-190.

fires and the iron for make shift shelters. The rest was burnt so that those on commando would find no food or shelter. Over thirty thousands farms were destroyed in this way.<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of September the Boers were successful in occupying the town of Potchefstroom. The British troops had to evacuate taking their prisoners with them. Those who had come into town from the district remained during the evacuation. Some of the town residents welcomed the Boers back. Among these was Falk Bengis, one time proprietor of the hotel and store, described earlier, at Buffelsdoorn. As the Boer occupation only lasted a couple of days, intelligence agents in the town noted those who spoke out against the British and on their return they faced dire consequences. Bengis was among those who were deported for he was “very Anti-British”, and was in “communication with the enemy, making remarks against the British.”<sup>42</sup> Nathan Levy, secretary of the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation gave evidence against Bengis. He stated that Bengis “has always expressed himself as being very friendly to the Boers and in private conversation has said the English could not win and that he hoped the Boers would win....He is a man I would not trust.”<sup>43</sup> Bengis was sent to a concentration camp in Johannesburg. He remained there a short while and later stayed in the city with his two daughters who had come out from Russia.<sup>44</sup> It is not known whether there was a personal vendetta between Bengis and Levy. However, Levy’s stance against his co-religionist indicates that his loyalties lay with the British and he was clearly doing his utmost to prove this. He had reached a level of assimilation where identifying with the host society was his ultimate goal.

Military manoeuvres continued around the town throughout the War. A correspondent for *The Times* describes some Jewish involvement in the hostilities and shows the attitude of distrust which the British had towards the Jews:

We passed to the north and westwards of Frederickstad about 12 midnight,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1423 (Compensation Claim: Falk Bengis).

<sup>43</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1423 (Compensation Claim: Falk Bengis). Testimony of N Levy before the Magistrate, Potchefstroom 20 December 1900.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

1 a.m. and 2 a.m., respectively, and on the way passed many farmsteads and one Jew's store, outside of which were two Jews, who were made prisoner and taken with us, for fear that any information should be carried to the Boers.

Unfortunately this store was not searched, as we heard afterwards that eight Boers were sleeping inside.<sup>45</sup>

He goes on to describe the state of the town at this time:

a large place, not so much on account of the number of houses, but because of the large compounds and gardens where the inhabitants keep their cattle, horses and goods. It has a nice club, containing cricket ground, lawn tennis courts, and bicycle track, close to the station; quantities of trees, of blue gum, fir, and mimosa, which is refreshing after the burnt veldts. The town is about four miles long by three broad, and is well watered by the Mooi River, which is a deep, clear, fast running stream. Many of the inhabitants are in a very bad way for food. Such things as coffee, tea, sugar, &c. are impossible to get, and many of the English children in the convent school have not seen their parents since the war began or even heard of them. Most of these were refugees and had to leave the country as best they could in the early stages, or else stand their chance of being commandeered. The town numbers among its residents many Griqualand West Boer women, who are a very rabid set and violent, and looted the stores, knocking over the police placed by the Boers.<sup>46</sup>

One of those who remained in the district, Isaac Nathanson, of Zeekoefontein, continued trading at his store with special permission from the Magistrate in Potchefstroom. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1900 he went to the market in Vereeniging to sell his potatoes and procure fresh supplies. Having left his travel permit behind at his store, Nathanson was arrested and sent directly to the Prisoner of War camp in Greenpoint, Cape Town. The charge sheet states that Nathanson's "conduct was suspicious" as he "remained in the

---

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 16 October 1900.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

theatre of War.”<sup>47</sup> He saw out the war in Cape Town listing his address as “Tent 15, Greenpoint Track.”<sup>48</sup> Captured at the same time was Samuel Bach, who had been on commando. He was sent to St. Helena together with Robert Meirowitz and his brother, Samuel Benjamin Meirowitz. This was the fate of many of the surviving members of the Potchefstroom Commando who were split up between the Prisoner of War camps at St. Helena and Greenpoint. A Dutch Jew, named van Nierop, was killed while scouting the road between Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp and it was reported that he received a Jewish burial in Potchefstroom. It is known that religious services continued in Potchefstroom throughout the War so it is quite possible that members of the *Chevra Kadisha* were able to perform Jewish burials rites when the need arose.<sup>49</sup>

Once the British had reentered the town and stability was restored, commercial life began returning to normal. The property of Jacob Singer remained locked up in his store. He had returned to the Transvaal from England and was working for the British Government on a military tailor’s contract. Situated in Johannesburg he was unable to return to Potchefstroom. Singer’s competition, a tailor named Sternberg, remained in the town during the War. At the beginning of October it was discovered that “the store of one Jacob Singer of this town had been entered and that clothing material was being conveyed to a certain store opposite The Royal Hotel occupied by one Sternberg also a tailor.”<sup>50</sup> The temporary police were called in immediately, the items were removed from Sternberg’s premises and stored in the local municipal offices. Singer’s material remained in the storeroom for a number of weeks but it was soon discovered that the items had disappeared. Whether or not Sternberg had been involved in their removal is unknown. There is no further mention of him in the records. When Singer was finally allowed to return to Potchefstroom in January 1901 he found his store vandalized and all items of value removed.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> TAB, CJC 329 ref CJC 1785 (Compensation Claim: Isaac Nathanson).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> SAJBD Archives. Rabinowitz Papers relating to Boere Jode.

<sup>50</sup> TAB, CJC 336, ref CJC 1885 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Singer).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Between the months of October 1900 and January 1901 the British army continued to patrol the Potchefstroom district trying to rout out Boer insurgents. Whilst moving from farm to farm they commandeered supplies on an ever increasing basis. All those who had remained at their farm stores were affected. As travel within the district was only allowed with a permit it became increasingly difficult to replenish stocks. Those storekeepers that weren't ruined by this constant depletion of supplies were constantly under surveillance. They were not permitted to trade with the Boer enemy though it is apparent that there must have been some business going on in the area to warrant their stores remaining open. It was this trade that allowed the commandos in the area to survive and also get news of the state of affairs in the town.<sup>52</sup>

It became self-evident to the British army that the Boer commandos had survived in the district and were using the supply stores and farms as points of rendezvous as well as purchasing or plundering goods. There were constant attempts to destroy British supply lines together with the ruining of railways lines and cutting of telegraph cables. The army realized that it needed to change its tactics in order to flush out the Boer resistance. The only way to go about this would be to remove all the remaining farmers, their families and workers, as well as the storekeepers from the district and destroy everything that might assist the Boers.

During the first months of 1901 the army enacted this plan and began clearing the district of inhabitants. People were given a few hours notice to leave their homes. They could only take with them what they could carry and had no idea where they were going. After inhabitants of farms and stores were taken away the army removed whatever they thought they might be able to use. Structures were stripped of their iron roofs and wood. They were then raised to the ground. Farms were burnt as were supplies that the army was

---

<sup>52</sup> TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1462 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Carolinski); TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman); TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz).

unable to remove. Thus nothing remained to sustain the Boer forces in the area. All shelter was gone.<sup>53</sup>

Those storekeepers who were brought into town were allowed to move around freely. They rented rooms and got on with their daily lives as best they could. This influx of people was a boost to the economy of the town though many did arrive without means. There was much concern among those brought into Potchefstroom from the district about their possessions left behind but there was a blackout on reports from the area. News filtered through from those newly arrived in town. It was distressing news as most people heard that everything had been destroyed.<sup>54</sup>

In January 1901 Harry and Samuel Hirschmann were captured outside Potchefstroom while on commando. They were taken to their store to collect their family and then to the Concentration Camp in Potchefstroom. They remained in the camp for a very short while where they stayed in tents on the open veld. When the Hirschmanns were allowed out of the camp they hired two small rooms in the town where the family saw out the War. Harry Hirschmann's son Fred remembered that food was very scarce during the War and everything had to be rationed. He further recalled attending Synagogue while the family were living in town.<sup>55</sup>

During the last year of the War guerilla fighting intensified though there was very little impact on the town of Potchefstroom. The district had been cleared of people and commercial enterprise and the economy stagnated as a result. As farming had ceased completely, food shortages were a constant problem. Those who were confined to the town tried as best they could to occupy their time with sporting and social activities. Travel out of the town was highly restricted and there was very little knowledge of what was happening in the outside world. After almost three years of war, there was great

---

<sup>53</sup> TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1462 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Carolinski); TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz); TAB, CJC 317 ref CJC 1591 (Compensation Claim: Wulf Herman); TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Fred Hirschmann, undated.



relief from all quarters when peace was finally reached with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 1902.<sup>56</sup>

It was agreed at the Treaty of Vereeniging that financial compensation would be given to those who could prove their losses. Most farmers and rural storekeepers had lost everything when they had been driven off the land. Their goods were requisitioned, their homesteads and stores demolished, and everything else left behind was burned.

Throughout the war those who had been displaced and lost their livelihoods suffered extreme poverty. Meager rations were provided in the concentration camps while those who took refuge in towns had to fend for themselves. For some, the burden of providing for a family became too onerous and suicide was their escape. The majority, however, took whatever employment they could find and survived on a greatly reduced income. There was always the hope that they would receive some recompense for what they had lost at the hands of the British Army and the Boer commandos and then attempt to rebuild their homes and their lives.<sup>57</sup>

In order to claim compensation proof had to be shown of all items requisitioned by either army. The claimant also had to show that he was neutral during the war and that he had proof of burghership or citizenship of country of his origin. Of the twenty-two claims submitted by Jews from Potchefstroom only four were paid out. The four who were paid only received a small fraction of their original submissions.<sup>58</sup>

The compensation process began almost as soon as the British occupied Potchefstroom. Claims were submitted from September 1900 all the way through to the beginning of 1903. These claims included detailed inventories of requisitioned items. Often lists were created from memory as the claimant did not have time to take his business books with

---

<sup>56</sup> Nasson p. 228.

<sup>57</sup> Davenport p. 204 and TAB CJC 304-329 (Various Compensation Claims).

<sup>58</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1446 (Compensation Claim: Boner, Tenenbaum and Starfield); TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun); TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr); TAB, CJC 1034 ref CJC 2022 (Compensation Claim: Herman Rubenstein).

him when being removed from the countryside.<sup>59</sup> One of the problems encountered by the board dealing with these claims was evidence provided in Yiddish. Jacob Beckman stated that “neither I nor my partner can read or write, our Books were kept by a Bookkeeper who left – since that (sic) we have kept our Books in the Jewish Language.”<sup>60</sup> Beckman further lamented that he had no time to collect his books before being brought into Potchefstroom and everything left behind was destroyed by fire. All he had with him were scraps of papers covered in Yiddish script to prove his losses.<sup>61</sup> The majority of those in the rural districts had similar experiences. Very few were able to present a full set of books to the authorities.<sup>62</sup>

Falk Bengis requested £3242 compensation for the destruction of his store, hotel and the goods contained therein. After thorough investigation by the authorities, who relied on the testimony of farmers in the surrounding areas, it was decided that Bengis had exaggerated his claim by almost £2000.<sup>63</sup> This was the greatest amount claimed, the least being £62. It was further shown that up to two thirds of the claims were incorrectly estimated. The government found that all amounts were inflated and refused full payment on this basis.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1901 the President of the District Board at Potchefstroom, English, began processing claims and making decisions as to who should be compensated and what amounts would be allowed. The question of neutrality, discussed earlier, negated a number of claimants as it was proven that they had either bought from the Boers or helped them in battle. Of the claims that English dealt with, they allowed figures usually less than a quarter of the full amount requested. Once his work was completed the files were sent to the Central Judicial Commission in Pretoria where the final judgment on payments would be made.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> TAB, CJC 325 ref CJC 1714 (Compensation Claim: Osche Levy).

<sup>60</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1416 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Beckman and Samuel Katz). Statement dated 23 October 1901.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> TAB CJC 304-329 (Various Compensation Claims).

<sup>63</sup> TAB, CJC 306 ref CJC 1423 (Compensation Claim: Falk Bengis).

<sup>64</sup> TAB CJC 304-329 (Various Compensation Claims)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Whilst the claims were being processed in Pretoria it was discovered that many of the Eastern European claimants were unable to prove citizenship to their country of birth. It became clear that most Jews had left illegally. It was a loophole in the law which the British government exploited to the fullest of its ability. When it was announced that Russian nationality had to be proven, those Jews produced consular certificates issued by the French Consul in Johannesburg, who was acting on behalf of the Russian vice-consul. These letters gave the place and date of birth of the applicant in Russia together with his date of departure from Russia and date of arrival in South Africa, as supplied by the applicant.<sup>66</sup>

On 4 November 1903 the Central Judicial Commission issued a blanket statement that all such claims relating to Russian subjects would be disallowed, unless they could produce an Imperial Russian Passport. Should the passport be older than five years and not renewed the claim would also be disallowed. The consular certificates issued by the French consul were considered invalid proof of Russian citizenship.<sup>67</sup> Thus eighteen of the Potchefstroom claims were disallowed. It is ironic that Jews who had fled Eastern Europe after centuries of persecution had to turn to the acting Russian-Consul for help which was given, and it was the British government, who had given them refuge from this oppression, that used their vulnerable situation against them. Just over half these claimants returned to Potchefstroom and the district, rebuilt their stores and their lives. The rest drifted to other towns where they reestablished themselves in business sometimes making a success.<sup>68</sup> There was a strong feeling of anti-alienism that pervaded South African society, and the British authorities did very little to hide this. Their comments were frequently antisemitic and it is a testament to the courage and strength of the immigrants that they were able to withstand this negative sentiment.

Two of the claims, submitted by Herman Rubenstein and Jacob Sherr, who could prove that they were naturalized Burghers, were finally paid out in 1906. Rubenstein claimed

---

<sup>66</sup> TAB, CJC 309 ref CJC 1458 (Compensation Claim: Bernard Brown) among others.

<sup>67</sup> TAB CJC 304-329 (Various Compensation Claims)

<sup>68</sup> TAB CJC 304-329 (Various Compensation Claims)

£213 and was paid £36, while Sherr claimed £430 and received £50.<sup>69</sup> Charles Boner, who was able to produce an Imperial Russian Passport, was given £80 of the £250 he had claimed.<sup>70</sup> The family of Joseph Aaron Braude Braun, who had committed suicide in Cape Town in 1901, pursued his claim on their behalf. Although doubt was cast on Braun's neutrality and his claim of £13232 was considered grossly exaggerated, the commission was satisfied that he had been in possession of an Imperial Russian Passport and granted his widow the generous sum of £2500 in compensation.<sup>71</sup>

After the devastation and losses sustained during the war it was the hope of many that they might receive some compensation to assist with the rebuilding of their lives. In most cases this compensation was not forthcoming. It is a true testament to the ability of these immigrants that they were able to overcome these financial obstacles and in many cases start afresh and make a success of their businesses and lives.

---

<sup>69</sup> TAB, CJC 1034 ref CJC 2022 (Compensation Claim: Herman Rubenstein); TAB, CJC 1023 ref CJC 4719 (Compensation Claim: Jacob Sherr).

<sup>70</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1446 (Compensation Claim: Boner, Tenenbaum and Starfield).

<sup>71</sup> TAB, CJC 308 ref CJC 1453 (Compensation Claim: Joseph Aaron Braude Braun).

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Reconstruction 1902-1914.**

In the aftermath of the South African War much emphasis was placed on the reconstruction of the Transvaal. Although it was a far from smooth road to recovery Potchefstroom experienced somewhat of a rebirth. Kitchener and Milner agreed to the repatriation of those displaced by the War and to the reconstruction of the infrastructure of the Colony for which £35 million was set aside. Despite Milner's efforts to "anglicize" the Transvaal there was a strong sense of Afrikaner nationalism which could not be crushed. Most of the refugees were allowed to return during 1902-1903 and began rebuilding their lives. By 1904 the gold mines were producing more than they had done before the War. With indentured Chinese labour on the mines the cost of production dropped and revenues continued climbing. Internal customs duties were abolished, leading to free trade within South Africa, though the drought of 1903-1908 prevented a boost in the rural economy.<sup>1</sup> The road ahead would challenge new and returning immigrants as they began to start life afresh.

After Johannesburg and Pretoria, Potchefstroom, was considered among the chief towns in the Transvaal and was at the centre of reconstruction and growth which continued until the beginning of the First World War. Education was of the utmost importance and three new schools opened. The Electric Light Company was inaugurated with the Queen's and Royal Hotels the first to be illuminated in the town. The Lyric Theatre opened with a production of *Broken Melody*. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Wesleyan Churches were reconsecrated. A library was opened but after two years of discussion it proved unpopular and soon closed. It was only replaced in 1914 by the Carnegie Library. The Imperial Garrison was stationed in Potchefstroom from the end of the War and built their cantonments at Derby Hill. They took part in all public functions and were very much in evidence in the town. The Industrial School and Orphanage were opened and the Lakeside Water Supply System was built on the Mooi River to divert water to

---

<sup>1</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, pp. 224-229.

Potchefstroom, the Mooibank Settlement and the Government Experimental Farm.<sup>2</sup> The Town Hall was opened by General Smuts. All of these amenities made life in Potchefstroom much more pleasant than it had been before. As a result the population of the town grew steadily from this period on.

Potchefstroom was described as:

one of the prettiest towns in the Western Transvaal, it is well laid out and has an abundant supply of water, which practically runs through all the streets in open furrows. It is, perhaps, more of a residential town than a business one, and in this respect, with a return to good times it will become even more so, especially as regards families and visitors from Johannesburg, from which town it is distant some 90 miles by rail. There is no mining in the district at present. The agricultural products supplied by the district are oats, mealies, corn, potatoes, fruit, tobacco, lucerne, cattle, sheep, goats and dairy produce.<sup>3</sup>

All building work on the synagogue was stopped during the War and it was finally completed in December 1902. Services had been held in the unfinished building the opening ceremony of which was presided over by Woolf Carlis of Klerksdorp. A large group of town residents turned out for the opening ceremony and to congratulate the

---

<sup>2</sup> I Sarid and C Bartolf, *Hermann Kallenbach: Mahatma Gandhi's friend in South Africa*, Gandhi-Informationen-Zentrum Selbstverlag, Israel, 1997. The Government Experimental Farm was established at the end of the South African War to train farmers who were returning to the land to grow productive crops and innovate new farming techniques. Among those who studied there was Hermann Kallenbach, friend of Mahatma Gandhi. Kallenbach implemented his training at Tolstoy farm which became a model settlement and a place for Indian refuge during the time of Gandhi's protests and his practicing of *satyagraha*. The Burgher Land Settlement scheme was developed by Woolf Carlis representing the government. Just over three hundred farmers were resettled on farms in an area known as Vyfhoek. Specially constructed irrigation furrows were used to water the crops. Carlis also financed a newspaper in Potchefstroom called *The Western Times* which later joined forces with *Die Volksblad*. In 1901 Carlis was described by the Civil Commissioner of Klerksdorp as a "very clever man. He has been a millionaire speculator. He did with Captain Lambart, Lieuts. Blagden, Pearse and Purvis as he willed. He made a good deal of money out of the Boer Commissariat and was anxious to do the same out of the British.... Although the owner of a lot of landed property he had but little cash, it having been put into cattle and produce.... He is a very generous man, being very free with his money. This makes him dangerous to weak officials. He was in his element under the Boer regime." After living briefly in Potchefstroom he returned to become the known as the "uncrowned King of Klerksdorp."

<sup>3</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's Report, 31 January 1904.

Jewish community on this achievement.<sup>4</sup> With all the development that was taking place in the town news spread that Potchefstroom had a very viable economic future. Refugees, who had been displaced by the South African War, began flooding back into what was now officially called the Transvaal. The Transvaal together with the three other colonies would make up South Africa. Immigration had slowed down during the war, but now that it was over the floodgates reopened. It is not surprising then that in 1904 we find a greatly enlarged Jewish population in Potchefstroom numbering 494, almost ten percent of the total White population.<sup>5</sup> There was a Black and Coloured population of 2000.<sup>6</sup> The large number of Jews account for all those living in the town as well as the district. Family groupings were large with between four and eight children as well as extended family. There were also many single men who were arriving from other towns within the Cape and Transvaal. The country hoteliers and storekeepers, discussed in the previous chapter, also account for this large number.<sup>7</sup> Although the newfound investment and relative stability in the town encouraged residents to remain there, there were still immigrants moving between towns. The British authorities at the Cape were not pleased with the large numbers of East European Jews arriving at South African ports. They attempted to make it more complicated for them to apply for naturalization but this ruling was soon overturned by a delegation that was to later become known as the Jewish Board of Deputies. The mood of anti-alienism had pervaded the whole country by this time. To the chagrin of local authorities the immigrants kept arriving.<sup>8</sup>

In 1903 the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal was established with the object of observing and taking "action with reference to all matters affecting the welfare of Transvaal and Natal Jews as a community." This body took as its mandate the "observation of all proceedings relative to Legislative and Municipal Enactments, and shall use such means as they deem requisite in order that no infraction of the religious rights, customs and privileges of the Jewish community may ensue therefrom; they shall also watch over the interests of the Jews in these Colonies and take such action as may be

---

<sup>4</sup> Rabinowitz, pp. 174-175.

<sup>5</sup> Transvaal Census, 1904

<sup>6</sup> Standard Bank Archives, Inspector's Report, 31 January 1904

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> See M Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society*, Historical Publication Society, Cape Town, 1983, pp. 57-73.

deemed by the Board to be conducive to their welfare and calculated to improve their general condition.”<sup>9</sup> According to Clause 3 of the constitution of the Board, any congregation with more than 50 members, their own place of worship, or a Jewish Helping Hand and or Burial Society of more than 200 members was allowed one representative on the Board.<sup>10</sup> On 7 November 1903 a “Letter was read from the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation appointing Bernard Arenstein as their delegate.”<sup>11</sup> A request was sent to Potchefstroom requiring proof of membership numbers and on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December a reply “was read from Potchefstroom covering list of members, total 60.”<sup>12</sup>

The community had not yet engaged a minister and the two Jewish marriages which took place in Potchefstroom in 1904 were performed by Rev. Bino Massel, minister to the Klerksdorp Hebrew Congregation. Massel had replaced Rev. East who had settled in Johannesburg the previous year.<sup>13</sup> A close relationship remained between the communities of Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp. On 1 January 1905, the thirty five year old Rev. Morris Isaac Cohen took up the post of minister to the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation. Rev. Cohen was born in Russia and moved with his family to England at a young age. There he studied for the Rabbinate and took up his first appointments in Scotland and later in Cork, Ireland. In late 1903 he came to South Africa, taking up a post in Volksrust before arriving in Potchefstroom.<sup>14</sup> Rev. Cohen’s first duty in his new congregation was to perform the marriage ceremony of Isaac Nathanson and Rachel Booch, both of Katdoornbosch.<sup>15</sup> Cohen’s relationship with the community was to be a long and successful one.

---

<sup>9</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archive: Constitution of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal.

<sup>10</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archive: Constitution of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal.

<sup>11</sup> SAJBD Archives. Minute Book of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal 1903-1909.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> TAB, M7748, Marriage Certificates: Simon Bass to Tilly Segall 26<sup>th</sup> June 1904; Benjamin L B Levy to Sarah R Metter 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1904.

<sup>14</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald*. 5 June 1925.

<sup>15</sup> TAB, M7749, Marriage Certificate: Isaac Nathanson and Rachel Booch, Potchefstroom 1 January 1905.



Of the twenty three Jewish marriages which took place in Potchefstroom between 1904 and 1914, the average age of the grooms was 29 while the brides were considerably younger at 22. The oldest groom was 36 while the youngest was 25. With the oldest bride at 29 the majority were between the ages of 18 and 23. These statistics give a clear indication of the length of time it took immigrant men to work themselves up the financial ladder. Before marriage they would need sufficient funds to acquire and run a home and soon after the ability to raise and educate a growing family. All of those who married during this period were storekeepers. Eight of the grooms lived on farms in district, another eight were from an assortment of other towns, while the remaining group lived in Potchefstroom. Only three of the brides lived on farms out of the town. This follows the traditional practice of returning to the bride's home for the marriage ceremony. Three of the grooms were English while all the rest were "Russian". Of the brides one was born in the Orange Free State, two in the Cape, two in England and all the rest in Russia. While most men who lived in Potchefstroom remained there for a time after marriage, many of the women marrying men from other towns left with their husbands. This added to the fluidity of an already mobile population.<sup>16</sup>

Even within this small, tightly knit Jewish community, there was some assimilation. Three further marriages certificates have been traced showing Russian Jewish immigrants marrying Afrikaans women. All of these men were *smouse* and would have spent most of their time trading in the company of non-Jews and especially Afrikaners. It is therefore unsurprising that some of them took Afrikaans wives.<sup>17</sup> Of the three, only Jacob Schwartz was resident in Potchefstroom. Jacob Schwartz and Jacob Solomon were married by the resident magistrates while Abraham Rudolf married in Church. The brides were aged between 20 and 25 while the grooms were 36, 40 and 21 respectively. All three couples remained in the district after their marriages. Whether they had contact with the Jewish community is unknown.

---

<sup>16</sup> TAB, M7750-7758, Marriage Certificates. Potchefstroom. Home Affairs Collection.

<sup>17</sup> TAB, M7750, Marriage Certificates. Potchefstroom. Home Affairs Collection. Marriages of Jacob Schwartz to Samuelina B M Fox 1903; Abraham S Rudolf to Elizabeth W Loots 1903; Jacob Solomon to Maria H S Mouton 1913.

In May 1903, with the death of Samuel Katz, the old Jewish cemetery in the centre of town, having been filled to capacity, was finally closed.<sup>18</sup> Land for a burial ground was granted to the community beside the new Christian cemeteries which were being developed further out of town. The first burial to take place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 1904, of Jacob Wacks, aged 26, who drowned accidentally while bathing on the bank of the Mooi River.<sup>19</sup> It was at about this time that the Potchefstroom Helping Hand and Jewish Burial Society, also known as the *Chevra Kadisha*, was formally reestablished by returning refugees and new residents of the town. The first president of this organization, Morris Marks Kaliski, a Polish Jew, had come to the Transvaal in 1894, having spent over a decade in England. Kaliski, a merchant tailor, had been involved in Jewish affairs in Klerksdorp prior to moving to Potchefstroom where he settled towards the end of the War.<sup>20</sup> Kaliski died on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1909 and his tombstone was unveiled in August of the following year.<sup>21</sup> Kaliski, like so many other newcomers to the town, brought with him a network of connections from all the previous places that he had lived in South Africa, and even abroad. Although they might have traded on a small scale in Potchefstroom they were able to call on friends and relatives in other towns and cities when some specific need arose. In Kaliski's case, for example, he knew that a friend in Cape Town, kept stock of special edging required from the *parochet* (curtain) in the Synagogue.<sup>22</sup> Although this particular case might have been unimportant these connections were maintained by most of the other members of the community. Thus a bustling business was done between all of these various merchants across the country.

The first two rows of graves in the Cemetery attest to the high rate of infant mortality with fifteen children under the age of one dying between 1904 and 1910.<sup>23</sup> Causes of death are commonly listed as convulsions, dysentery, dyspepsia, enteritis, gastritis, and teething.<sup>24</sup> This experience was mirrored by the Johannesburg Jewish community which

<sup>18</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation, Chevra Kadisha Cash Book.

<sup>19</sup> TAB. M 6989. Death Certificate. Jacob Wacks.

<sup>20</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald*, 30 July 1909.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 16 August 1910.

<sup>22</sup> Interview, M Seligman.

<sup>23</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation, Chevra Kadisha Cash Book.

<sup>24</sup> TAB M6989, Death Certificates: Noah Niemann, Millie Niemann, Elias Wolff Levy, Maurice Niemann, etc.

had had an inordinately high number of infant deaths.<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Colman Cohen, Edda Rasse Hare, and Bella Starfield all died in childbirth.<sup>26</sup> Medical treatment was not yet sophisticated enough to save all of these women and children. The high rate of infant mortality mirrored that of larger towns like Johannesburg where these numbers were very high.<sup>27</sup> It was only in 1914 that the hospital was finally opened.<sup>28</sup> Then there were tragic unexpected deaths like that Isaac Margolius, aged 14, who was walking from school to his father's store at Gerhardminnebron, when he was struck by lightning. Death was instantaneous.<sup>29</sup> There is one other death reported of Isaac Smulian who died of unknown but natural causes.<sup>30</sup>

There were also members of the community who met with violent deaths. Samuel Merwitz, a general store keeper, of Kraalkop Farm, was shot with a revolver by an unknown assailant at his store on 30 June 1906. He died that night of peritonitis after sustaining severe abdominal injuries. Robbery is given in the inquest report as the reason for the shooting. There were no witnesses and the murderer was never apprehended. The Resident Magistrate requested permission from the Chevra Kadisha to remove the body to Johannesburg for burial, as Merwitz had a wife and family living there. Permission was immediately given and the following day the body was interred at Braamfontein Cemetery.<sup>31</sup> A few years later another murder occurred. A dispute arose between Frederick Wilhelm Wilken, manager of the King's Hotel in Potgieter Street, and Henry Saul Rose, a waiter, at the same hotel. Rose, an American Jew, aged about 28, had come out to Potchefstroom to relatives, the Gordimer family, while his father and siblings remained in Philadelphia. He started work at the King's Hotel as a cab driver and was later promoted to the position of waiter. It was never revealed what caused the dispute between Wilken and Rose. Wilken was killed as a "result of four bullet wounds, fired

<sup>25</sup> M Robertson and M Kaplan (eds.), *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*, Vlaeberg Publishers, Cape Town, 1991, pp. 94-95.

<sup>26</sup> TAB, M6994, Death Certificates: Mrs. Colman Cohen, Bella Starfield, Edda R Hare.

<sup>27</sup> See M Robertson and M Kaplan, "Johannesburg's first organized social welfare work" in M Kaplan and M Robertson, (eds.) *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*, Vlaeberg Publishers, Cape Town, 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins pp. 110-115.

<sup>29</sup> TAB, M7000, Death Certificate: Isaac Margolius.

<sup>30</sup> TAB, M7003, Death Certificate: Isaac Smulian.

<sup>31</sup> TAB, M7000, Death Certificate and Inquest Documents: Samuel Merwitz.

from a revolver, any one of which would have been fatally afflicted by Henry (or Hyman) Saul Rose.”<sup>32</sup> Rose then took his own life with the same revolver. Although it is stated on a number of documents that Rose was Jewish he was buried in the general cemetery. Whether this was an attempt by the community to disassociate itself from Rose or whether he was not identified as Jewish until after his burial is unknown.<sup>33</sup> It is unlikely this murder was connected to the underworld of the larger cities, but rather the outcome of a complicated personal dispute.

The Ledger containing financial statements of the Potchefstroom Helping Hand and Jewish Burial Society is the only extant record of the society’s activities. In 1906 there were 57 paid up members, seventeen of whom were living in the district while the rest were resident in the town. Annual membership cost 9 shillings in 1906 and remained at this rate until 1921 when it was increased to 12 shillings. There are 26 references in the register to members who arrived in the town and district, paid their fees and then left after a year or two. Only one defaulted on payment before leaving. Most proceeded to Johannesburg while a few moved on to other small towns. The transient nature of South African Jewry is once again apparent at this point in history.<sup>34</sup>

Synagogue affairs remain a mystery as there are no extant minute books. There are, however, references to the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation within the records of other institutions as well as a small number of newspaper reports referring to communal activity. Although some of these references only give passing mention to Potchefstroom it can be seen how the Synagogue and community were involved in both Jewish and town events.<sup>35</sup> For example an article in the 22 October 1909 edition of the *Potchefstroom Herald* reported on the annual general meeting of the congregation. Jacob Singer was re-elected president, A Niemann vice president, Mr. Hirschfield treasurer, and a committee of Messrs A Monk, A Butchinsky, I Sandler, Simon Hare, Philip Barenblatt and Arthur Kaliski. The secretary reported that “the balance sheet showed a cash credit balance of

<sup>32</sup> TAB, M7021, Death Certificate: Frederick Wilhelm Wilken.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: Henry (or Hyman) Saul Rose.

<sup>34</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation, Chevra Kadisha Cash Book.

<sup>35</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald*, various articles dated between 1905 and 1914.

£70.” It was also stated that the bond on the Synagogue property had been paid in full.<sup>36</sup> At the annual general meeting of 1913, attended by 43 members, Jacob Singer retained the position of president. Isaac Nathanson was elected vice president, Morris Starfield honorary treasurer, J Robinson honorary secretary and S Finn, M B Bloch, L Lobascher, J Shulman and D David were elected to the committee.<sup>37</sup>

As in many other small communities, the Jewish women of Potchefstroom did much to promote charity work in the town. They organized fetes to raise funds and in July 1909 arranged an afternoon for the entertainment of the orphans. This event took place at the Queen’s Hotel, where a sports field was set up and winners received “beautiful prizes.” The Mayoress was in attendance and distributed the prizes. Each child “received presents in the shape of a toy, a packet of sweets and a lucky packet” from Rev. Cohen. Refreshments were served “and music was supplied through the medium of a gramophone.” After the events material was given to the Sisters who ran the orphanage to make clothes for the children.<sup>38</sup> This event shows that the community’s charitable endeavours extended beyond their own institutions and the general community at large. There was a great need for these immigrants to feel accepted by their host society and charity was a good way of promoting this acceptance and interaction.

As the community developed so did the institutions under its umbrella. After the South African War the Zionist Societies reemerged in the Transvaal. In Potchefstroom, the society founded in 1898 had lain dormant until 1902 when refugees began returning. The following year a children’s group was established as a means to promote Jewish education.<sup>39</sup> At the Zionist Conferences of 1905 and 1906 Potchefstroom was represented by Benjamin Levy and Rev. Cohen respectively.<sup>40</sup> Although much was happening in the sphere of the South African Zionist movement the society in Potchefstroom was practically inactive for the first decade of the new century. This was not unique to Potchefstroom and was mirrored by similar societies in many other small towns

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 22 October 1909.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 11 November 1913.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 16 July 1909.

<sup>39</sup> Gitlin, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> SAJBD Archives, Zionist Federation Records.

throughout the country.<sup>41</sup> The hall where communal get-togethers were arranged was known as the Zionist Hall and the society invited speakers to address the community.<sup>42</sup> The first known occasion when such an event took place was in May 1909 when Joseph Shacksnovis<sup>43</sup> “gave an able Lecture on Zionism.”<sup>44</sup> Under the leadership of Morris Starfield, president in 1909, the society took on a new life. The ladies committee agreed to provide entertainment “with refreshments” to the community and an Entertainment Committee and Musical Programme Committee were elected.<sup>45</sup> Not only were members promoting Zionism but there was a great deal of socializing taking place at meetings and events. Members were very creative in livening up the character of small towns in this way. The society was also involved in the Jewish community on a practical level. They assisted new immigrants with the naturalization process and gave classes in English conversation. Meetings continued to give focus to the social gatherings of the community.<sup>46</sup>

After the Rosh Hashana celebrations of 1909, the society reorganized itself. Rev. Cohen was elected to the committee. It was reported that all dues had been paid up and that there was surplus of £5 in the bank. A new constitution was drawn up and approved. The object of the Society was defined as “to further the interest of Zionism, as laid down by the Basle programme, viz:-

- a. Obtaining a legally safe-guarded Home in Palestine for the Jewish People.
- b. Fostering the National Idea in Israel.
- c. Supporting existing Colonies, founding of new Colonies in Palestine, and assisting news settlers or artisans in Palestine.
- d. Fostering the knowledge of Hebrew as a living tongue.

---

<sup>41</sup> See M Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing*.

<sup>42</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Society Minute Book (PZSMB) 19 May 1909.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Bernard Shacksnovis (1876-1946) was a leading member of the Transvaal Zionist Association who stood for Parliament in 1910.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> PZSMB 24 May 1909.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 6 June 1909.

e. To develop the above programme by encouraging social and intellectual intercourse by means of lectures, debates upon, or reading of, Jewish History or any other interesting subject, instituting social entertainment.”<sup>47</sup>

Membership would be open to all Jews and subscriptions were set at 12 shillings for both men and women. Women were later exempted from paying fees. Morris Starfield was reelected President and a list of 48 men and 14 women were submitted for membership.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, in 1910, the four colonies including the Cape, Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State came together as The Union of South Africa. Celebrations were held across the country including Potchefstroom. Businesses and buildings “were profusely decorated with flags and bunting” for the occasion. Jacob Shulman, showing his sense of patriotism, renamed his bakery “the Union Bakery” in honour of the festivities. The census of the following year showed 498 Jews living in the Potchefstroom district.<sup>49</sup> This number was almost exactly the same as it had been in 1904. Clearly the influx of immigrants in the post war period had slowed down. The make up of the Jewish population of the town had changed from being one of mainly single men. This steadiness in numbers can be explained by the fact that immigrants were bringing their wives and families to South Africa and those who married locally were having children of their own. This younger generation were bolstering the numbers of the local community. As the population of the town of Potchefstroom increased the relative size of the Jewish community now decreased to just six percent of European inhabitants. The Jews of Potchefstroom made up just over one percent of the 46919 Jewish inhabitants of South Africa.<sup>50</sup>

On the eve of Rosh Hashana (New Year) 1912 the synagogue was filled to capacity. The Rev N Lapato, “a member of Cantor Sirota’s famous choir, of Warsaw,”<sup>51</sup> was present, being unable to reach his destination of Pretoria due to a train strike. Rev. Cohen addressed the congregation first in English and later in Yiddish. The full text of his

---

<sup>47</sup> PZSMB, Constitution 1909.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *First Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911*, Government Printer and Stationer, Pretoria.

<sup>50</sup> *First Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911*, Government Printer and Stationer, Pretoria.

<sup>51</sup> Cantor Gershon Sirota, often referred to as the Jewish Caruso, was one of the leading cantors in Poland.

sermon “How to Secure Happiness” was reported in the newspaper. All Jewish stores were closed for the two days of New Year.<sup>52</sup> It can clearly be observed that although there was some degree of assimilation within the community, they still requested a sermon in Yiddish to be presented. Members of the community still addressed one another in Yiddish, though there was a growing need to be conversant in English for commercial purposes.

In 1912 the Jewish Board of Deputies of the Cape Colony and its counterpart representing the Transvaal and Natal merged to form United South African Jewish Board of Deputies, an umbrella body representing all Jews in the Union.<sup>53</sup> At this time Potchefstroom reapplied for membership and the following year this was granted.<sup>54</sup> David Starfield was nominated the representative for Potchefstroom and he brought “to the notice of the meeting .... the Butchers’ difficulties in providing Kosher meat for Sundays owing to the Sunday’s Trading Law.”<sup>55</sup> The board pointed out that deliveries were allowed on Sundays and that it was sales that were prohibited. They requested that the matter be made a test case and contacted the Public Prosecutor in Potchefstroom for his opinion.<sup>56</sup> The Public Prosecutor referred the matter to the Attorney General for a reply. In his reply to the Board, the Attorney General agreed with the Board’s ruling, but pointed out that “a local magistrate had stated that it was illegal and the police acted on that opinion, and neither the magistrate nor police were under his control. Any butcher, however, fined for delivering meat on Sunday morning could have the point of law settled by appealing to the Supreme Court.” Thus, the matter was resolved.<sup>57</sup> Clearly the question of *Kashrut* was extremely important in the eyes of this observant community. They were now able to fulfill their obligation of eating *Kosher* meat. Throughout the coming years the supply of *Kosher* meat would cause problems to the community. This experience was mirrored by small communities throughout the country.

---

<sup>52</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 27 September 1912.

<sup>53</sup> M Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society*, pp. 104-109.

<sup>54</sup> SAJBD Archives, South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Executive Council Minutes 11 February 1912.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 1 May 1913.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* 9 September 1913.

<sup>57</sup> SAJBD Archives, South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Executive Council Minutes. 24 March 1914.



school with a total of 46 for the period between 1905 and 1914.<sup>64</sup> A 1909 list of girls who passed their music examinations at the Convent of the Sacred Heart shows three Jewish girls and the points they scored in their preparatory examinations: Florry Cohen (91), Pauline Beckman (82) and Gladys Solomon (81).<sup>65</sup> It was in these schools that there was the greatest chance for children to integrate into the wider society. Only English or Afrikaans was spoken at school and friendships were developed with children of other religions.

David Starfield, representative for Potchefstroom to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, brought the attention of the executive council to the fact that the Central School was holding classes on a Saturday and that Jewish children were expected to attend. Although the apparent secularization of the community was picking up pace, this was one step too far. The council resolved to ask Schools Administrator to address this problem throughout the Transvaal.<sup>66</sup> In response to the Board's complaint the Transvaal Education Department agreed to stop Saturday sessions from the beginning of the next school term.<sup>67</sup> In 1914 Potchefstroom requested that the Board try to persuade the government to employ a Jewish teacher for religious instruction at the government schools. The Board responded that it "could do nothing so long as the law was what it was, and suggesting that the congregation ought themselves to provide for religious instruction to be given outside school hours and the government schools, as is done in Johannesburg."<sup>68</sup> The responsiveness of the authorities indicates that they were willing to take in account the religious needs of a minority grouping. Their fair treatment of the community implies a good relationship between the government institutions and Jewish community.

It is very difficult to gauge the relationship between the Jewish community and the non-White communities of Potchefstroom as very little written evidence remains on this subject. Jews engaged with non-Whites whom they employed as servants, shop attendants and often customers. In 1911 Nathan Kaliski was licenced to open a "Tent

<sup>64</sup> High School for Boys, Potchefstroom, Attendance Register 1905-1914.

<sup>65</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 13 August 1909.

<sup>66</sup> SAJBD Archives, South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Executive Council Minutes 1 May 1913.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* 14 July 1913.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid* 24 March 1914.

Bioscope” in the “Native Location” or in the Indian Bazaar.<sup>69</sup> Kaliski was granted permission and saw to the erection of the tent and operation of the bioscope. Fred Hirschmann remembered that his mother had “the usual native servants” who “reared the children.” and “you could depend on them for anything you wanted.” His parents did business with the Indian storekeepers.<sup>70</sup> Martha Brasch had White nannies but a black domestic worker helping her mother in the house.<sup>71</sup>

In 1908 at a meeting of the executive council of the Board of Deputies “Dr Hertz drew attention to the case of Ralph Cohen of Potchefstroom whom the Chief Justice had sentenced to 3 years hard labour and 10 lashes for the ill-treatment of a Kaffir, whereas at Pretoria a Field Cornet had been fined £15 for a similar offence, and at Winburg a farmer to a fine of £25. Nobody doubted the Chief Justice’s fair mindedness but the fact left a bad impression. Mr. Patlansky drew attention to a similar case in Klerksdorp. After discussion it was resolved that it is impossible to interfere with the due administration of justices and the matter was dropped.”<sup>72</sup>

When analyzing feelings towards the Indian community economic competition appears to be the motivating factor behind this question. It is interesting to note that both Indians and Jews were the focus of anti-alien agitation in South Africa and the case below illustrates the clash by two members of similarly discriminated against groupings. In a letter to the *South African Jewish Chronicle* a Mr. Hirsch stated that “Asian store-keepers who have settled in such towns like Potchefstroom, Vryburg and Ladysmith have ‘brought thousands of once happy and prosperous shop-keepers to bankruptcy and ruin.’” The editor of this newspaper, Lionel Goldsmid, wrote a measured response explaining that the Indian community of Potchefstroom had dwindled considerably since the War and that all licenses to trade were issued by the appropriate authorities. Thus the Indian community was in no way controlling the economic future of the town. There was no

---

<sup>69</sup> TAB, MPO 2/1/82 ref 1350.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Fred Hirschmann, undated.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Martha Brasch, undated.

<sup>72</sup> SAJBD Archives, South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Executive Council Minutes

The training camp gave the local economy the boost which it sorely needed. Provisions had to be supplied and soldiers needed to be entertained during their leave. Many of the Jewish merchants, bakers, butchers, tailors, hoteliers, restaurateurs, and so forth, made a good living during this period. Others were drawn to the town in the hope of similar wealth and as a result the Jewish population began to grow again.<sup>4</sup> With the increase in population a greater number of marriages were taking place in the community and as a result the number of South African-born Jewish children was growing.<sup>5</sup>

In the wider South African Jewish context the loyalty of East European immigrants was questioned as it was presumed that fewer of them and their sons were joining up, when compared with local Anglo Jewry. In Potchefstroom, however this was not the case. Military records show that the majority of Jewish recruits were either born in Eastern Europe or were the children of immigrants from there. Among these were Mr. Arenstein (8<sup>th</sup> SA Infantry), I Green (German East Africa), S Green (5<sup>th</sup> SAH in 2<sup>nd</sup> Mounted Brigade), B Isaacs (Pretoria Regiment), A Levi (Western Transvaal Rifles), J M Levy, M Woolf (SA Light Trench Battery), H Bloch (President Steyn Regiment), O & A Behrmann (SA Artillery), A Monk (SA Medical Corps), and H Starfield in the (SAAF).<sup>6</sup> It became clear from the number of Jewish soldiers enlisting that Jewish immigrants to South Africa had embraced their new culture and were proud and patriotic citizens of the country. The Jewish community was pleased with the publicity that their recruits received and made every effort to keep news of them in the press.<sup>7</sup> They desperately wanted to appear loyal citizens of South Africa and felt that this sacrifice would secure their place in their host society.<sup>8</sup>

During the War communication with relatives in Eastern Europe was cut off and within the Jewish community there was a great sense of fear regarding the safety of their

---

<sup>4</sup> family notes: Finn, Shulman, etc.

<sup>5</sup> TAB. Potchefstroom Marriage registers on microfilm.

<sup>6</sup> Attestation files, Military Archives Pretoria.

<sup>7</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald*, see various published letters and telegrams from soldiers to their families.

<sup>8</sup> R Mendelsohn "The Boer War, The Great War, and the Shaping of South African Jewish Loyalties," p. 54.

for two years. It is therefore likely that he kept in touch with members of the community.<sup>13</sup>

The first hospital was opened in Potchefstroom in 1918. Dr Philip Roytowski, of Cape Town, was appointed Acting District Surgeon. His tenure was to last only a few short months as he died in Potchefstroom while treating patients during the Great Flu Epidemic on 29 October 1918, aged 34.<sup>14</sup> Roytowski left a wife and infant daughter who returned to live with relatives in Cape Town.<sup>15</sup> The community came to an arrangement with the local Hospital Board that they would be given eighty free beds a year in return for their donation of £24. Many community members had previously been unable to pay their hospital fees and this measure came as a great relief to them. It was also agreed that the community would be advised when any Jewish patients were admitted so that kosher food could be provided. The practice of caring for the sick was a typical component of South African and World Jewish Communities. A sub-committee arranged for hospital visits by the minister and community members.<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Judelsohn was invited to be a member of the Hospital Board. He also served on the committee of the Hebrew Congregation.<sup>17</sup> Many new immigrants were making just enough money to feed and house themselves and their families and could afford no unexpected emergencies. Thus the community took care of their health requirements.

The Community approached Dr Russell, superintendent of the "Local Mental Institution" (Witrand), for permission to visit the local Jewish inmates. They requested that should any inmate become seriously ill the community be informed so that the minister could be with them and administer the necessary prayers. Previously they had only been informed when a Jewish inmate had passed away. Dr Russell granted all of the community's requests.<sup>18</sup> Treatment of mental patients was still in its infancy and it was thought scandalous that any members of the community or even people of the same faith be

---

<sup>13</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books.

<sup>14</sup> Potchefstroom Chevra Kadisha. Cemetery Register.

<sup>15</sup> Roytowski family papers.

<sup>16</sup> PHCMB 17 Feb 1924.

<sup>17</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 22 Mar 1927 and 18 Jan 1929.

<sup>18</sup> PHCMB 13 Nov 1927.

admitted to Witrand. Even decades later the hospital was spoken about in hushed tones and with a great sense of sadness.<sup>19</sup>

Records of the meetings of the Synagogue committee begin in 1919.<sup>20</sup> Meetings appear well run, the constitution of the congregation was strictly adhered to and the various presidents of the Congregation were highly respected.<sup>21</sup> There was often lively debate, especially when salary increases were requested.<sup>22</sup> Although the vast majority of members were of Eastern European origin committee meetings were run in a very orderly and formal fashion which indicates their shift towards acculturation. On occasion members of the community behaved in an inappropriate fashion and their “disgraceful conduct” was censured by the committee.<sup>23</sup> Despite the financial prosperity of a number of members of the community not all of those in the town had been successful. The congregation found it difficult to collect dues and was plagued with financial problems throughout the War and the decade thereafter.<sup>24</sup> Income was always less than expenditure and wealthier members were regularly called upon to make up the shortfall. This proved to be such an issue that the President, Morris Starfield resigned and the committee had to be reconstituted. The bank was threatening to discontinue the overdraft facility. An urgent collection was made and the overdraft was finally brought down to a manageable amount.<sup>25</sup>

The Jewish community of the town was now at its largest, numbering some 663 people.<sup>26</sup> The increase in numbers can be accounted for by continued immigration, a higher number of young couples of childbearing age settling in the town, and the continued

---

<sup>19</sup> Interviews: Waks, Shulman, Herr.

<sup>20</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Minute Book (PHCMB) 23 Nov 1919.

<sup>21</sup> The Presidents of the congregation were: Louis Solomon (1919-1920/1929), Jacob Shulman (1921), Morris Starfield (1922), Solomon Hirschmann (1923/1927), Jacob Singer (1924-1925), Jacob Sherr (1926), Harry Hirschmann (1928).

<sup>22</sup> PHCMB 7 Dec 1919.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 11 April 1920.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 1914-1929.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 10 Dec 1922.

<sup>26</sup> *Third Census of Population of the Union of South Africa, 1921*, Government Printer and Stationary Office, Pretoria 1922.

transience of the immigrant community of South Africa. The good economy and highly functional community infrastructure continued to be a strong draw card. It must be noted that there were still a large number of Jews in Potchefstroom throughout this period who only stayed in the town for a year or so before moving on.<sup>27</sup>

With an ever increasing number of congregants the community decided that it had grown sufficiently to warrant the building of a new Synagogue, the old building having become too small. The congregation had sufficient savings to consider acquiring new premises. They could also continue paying Rev Cohen's monthly salary, which was increased in 1919 from £25 to £30 a month. This was a source of constant debate. Once this was settled the plans for building could commence.<sup>28</sup> Financial uncertainty remained a question addressed at most committee meeting throughout this period. In November 1919 a number of possible sites were inspected and even an old church building was considered. This building was seen as the best alternative as the structure was spacious and sound and it could easily be converted for the purposes of a Synagogue. An offer of £1500 was made to the owners.<sup>29</sup> The offer was rejected and it took seven months before the committee again raised the question of a new building.<sup>30</sup> It was unanimously agreed to purchase a vacant stand in Lombard Street that had been approved by the builders and architect (Mr. Gaisford) who had inspected it. Quotes for building were given out to tender, the lowest of which was £4000. The committee agreed to this price and Mr. van der Linde, the builder, promised them a new Synagogue within 6 months. Mr. Pincus, a member of the congregation, would supply the bricks.<sup>31</sup> In September 1920 the foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Nathanson, who had donated the initial sum of £800 that started the collection for the new building.<sup>32</sup> The inscription on the stone read: "To the Glory of God and in memory of Isaac Nathanson this stone was laid by his wife, Rebecca Rachael Nathanson, on 29<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1920". Mrs. Nathanson was presented with a

---

<sup>27</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books.

<sup>28</sup> PHCMB 7 Dec 1919.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 23 Nov 1919.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 14 Jun 1920.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Isaac Nathanson had been a successful merchant and speculator in Potchefstroom for almost two decades. He and his wife Rebecca, had no children, and were always very generous to the congregation and local Jewish charities.

silver trowel to commemorate the occasion. With her agreement the trowel was sold by auction at the opening and £400 was realized.<sup>33</sup>

Building work commenced and by May 1921 the structure was nearing completion. Costs had run over the proposed budget and the committee became anxious that they would not be able to meet their obligations. While building continued they had held onto the old Synagogue building and were now questioning whether it should be sold to defray costs. The committee could not agree on a course of action and the matter was temporarily shelved. In an attempt to raise much needed funds it was decided that the prices of the new seats in the Synagogue be raised considerably above those of the old building. A sliding scale of £12, £9, and £6 was decided on according to the position of the new seats. Those wanting to pay the top price would be seated at the very front while the cheaper seats ensured a place in the middle rows and the cheapest price bought a seat right at the very back.<sup>34</sup> The question of reserved seats was a sore point with many members of the community who were unable to pay any fees at all and felt that they were being shamed due to lack of funds. Numerous debates were held on this issue but the committee stood their ground.<sup>35</sup> This question of differently priced seats reflects the incipient class divide that existed within the Synagogue and the community. The tradition of buying seats was one which the congregants would have known in their home towns in Eastern Europe.

As seats could not be sold until the Synagogue was opened the women of the congregation were called upon to hold a fund-raising bazaar at the beginning of July.<sup>36</sup> A silver key was made for the occasion and was put up for auction.<sup>37</sup> Preparation for the opening of the new Synagogue was met with great excitement and pride by the community. At the beginning of August 1921 the benches were removed from the old building and fixed in their place in the new one. Invitations were sent out to all the members, as well as the various Jewish communities in Johannesburg and the district. It was decided that "all members should meet at the old Synagogue ...the silver key should

<sup>33</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 1 Oct 1920.

<sup>34</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 1 Oct 1920.

<sup>35</sup> PHCMB see 1 May 1921 and 30 Aug 1925.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 15 Jun 1921.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 3 Jul 1921.

be sold by auction...after that, the procession should start to the new Synagogue in motors, with the scrolls etc. for the opening ceremony.<sup>38</sup> The following gifts to the Synagogue were recorded: Mrs. Olswang's *parochet* (curtain) for the Ark; a chandelier from the Talmudic Society;<sup>39</sup> religious books from Gabbe Bros.; a clock from Mr. Shulman.<sup>40</sup> Presenting an item to the Synagogue and having the name of the benefactor inscribed thereon, was a public display of generosity that would be noted by all. It spoke of the success of the benefactor and was a testament to the upward mobility of poor immigrants who came out to South Africa with very little. Furthermore, the Synagogue was the pride of the community and its outfitting was carefully monitored by the all congregants. The opening ceremony took place on 17 August 1921.<sup>41</sup>

Within nine months of the opening cracks began appearing in the walls and ceiling of the Synagogue. A special meeting was held to address the problem and it was decided to ask the architect and builder to inspect the damage.<sup>42</sup> This process dragged on from May until November 1922 when it was recorded that the builder had refused to repair the damage to the Synagogue. It was decided to institute legal proceedings against the builder and the architect and claim from them £1000 in damages. The committee would withhold £200 payment as the contract gave them permission to do.<sup>43</sup> These proceedings never came about. This immigrant community had quickly learned how to use the South African legal system for their benefit.

However, discussions between the builder, architect and committee continued for well over two years before the builder brought an action against the community for the recovery of the £200 owing to him plus interest. The case came before the local court in November 1924 and every detail of the proceedings was published daily in the press under the title "The Synagogue Case".<sup>44</sup> All plans of the building were lost by the

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 31 Jul 1921.

<sup>39</sup> No other mention of this society can be found. It's possible that this was an informal group led by Hirscha Herr.

<sup>40</sup> PHCMB 20 Aug 1922.

<sup>41</sup> *The Star* 18 Aug 1921.

<sup>42</sup> PHCMB 21 May 1922.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 19 Nov 1922.

<sup>44</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 28 Nov 1924.



Municipality, the builder and the architect. The cracks were blamed on the sand, the mortar and the architect, rather than builder's negligence. Even the "low tensile strength" of Potchefstroom bricks was explored. Expert witnesses confirmed these claims.<sup>45</sup> The defense claimed that the builder had used low grade materials rather than those which the architect had advised and pocketed the difference. The architect agreed and stated that he had taken the builder at his word and after an initial inspection had trusted his judgment.<sup>46</sup> In April 1925, 6 months after the case began, the Judge declared that the Hebrew Congregation did not have sufficient evidence that builders' negligence had caused the cracks to appear and ordered the Congregation to pay the builder what he was owed, with interest. Blame was laid squarely at the feet of the architect.<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew Congregation also had to pay all legal costs.<sup>48</sup>

An ongoing problem which confronted the committee of the Congregation at this time, and most Jewish communities throughout South Africa, was the provision of Kosher meat.<sup>49</sup> Central to Jewish religious practice is the consumption of specially slaughtered and prepared meat and poultry. In small towns there was a monopoly on such slaughtering due to the few qualified practitioners. This system was often open to abuse. Although there were Jewish butchers in Potchefstroom they still needed to employ the services of Rev. Cohen to do the slaughtering. He was qualified as a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and only he could be relied on to prepare the animals and meat correctly. In Nov 1919 the committee decided to award the Kosher meat contract equally between Isaac Rudolph and Messrs. Rudolph and Margolius.<sup>50</sup> The following day a special meeting was called to protest that decision and a petition was presented to the committee by Abraham Herr, Harry Hirschmann and 9 other members. They requested that the contract be given out equally between a Christian and Jewish butcher. In the past when contracts were awarded to Jewish butchers only they had abused the privilege and did not

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 15 Dec 1924.

<sup>46</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 19 Dec 1924.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 3 April 1925.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 24 April 1925.

<sup>49</sup> R Mendelsohn, "Oom Paul's Publicist: Emanuel Mendelssohn, founder of the first congregation" in M Kaplan and M Robertson, *Founders and Followers, Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*, Vlaeberg Publishers, Cape Town, 1991, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> PHCMB 26 Nov 1919.

strictly follow the rules of *Kashrut*. In a conciliatory move it was decided that Mr. Weid, a Christian butcher, be given half the contract. After much debate it was finally voted on that the other half of the contract be given to Messrs. Rudolph and Margolius. The petitioners were then satisfied.<sup>51</sup>

It is clear just how seriously members of the community treated this issue. The Kosher meat contract was clearly very lucrative. Isaac Rudolph was accused of opening up his own butchery after the tender process had begun and after he had discovered the prices quoted by the other butchers.<sup>52</sup> The contract was reviewed on an annual basis and there were regular queries about the conditions of slaughtering and whether all the rules of *Kashrut* were being followed. Each member of the community had to order their own meat and pay the butcher the relevant costs. Country members could ask the *shochet* to come out to them to kill their poultry. In these cases the congregation and *shochet* both received a fee. The *shochet* followed a regular route throughout the district. There were frequent cases where members had not paid their dues and had to be removed from the lists of places visited until they could begin payment again.<sup>53</sup> There were also times when there was no *shochet* available and then members would have to travel to Klerksdorp for their kosher meat.<sup>54</sup>

During the Great War most of the communal social activity had been focused on fund raising for the war effort.<sup>55</sup> The Zionist movement regained momentum after the announcement of the Balfour Declaration, wherein the British government stated their favourable views on the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.<sup>56</sup> The Potchefstroom Zionist Association remained dormant throughout the War years holding its first meeting in May 1919. It was resuscitated by Abraham M Abrahams, President of the South African Zionist Federation, who was visiting

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 27 Nov 1919.

<sup>52</sup> PHCMB 7 Dec 1919

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 6 Jan 1926.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 28 Dec 1922.

<sup>55</sup> R Mendelsohn, "The Boer War, The Great War, and the Shaping of South African Jewish Loyalties", p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionist: The South African Experience 1910-1967*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980, pp. 42-46.

Potchefstroom for that very purpose. Abrahams and M S Aaron, a member of the Executive Committee in Johannesburg, drew a large crowd from the community to their lecture and it was decided to reorganize the Society. Harry Finn was elected president, Louis Shakinovsky, vice president, H Solomon, treasurer, and Freda Sack honorable secretary. The first order of business to be addressed was the question of subscriptions which had been so difficult to collect in previous years. Membership fees were set at 12/- per annum for both ladies and gentlemen. This was the first platform where Jewish women could express their views in a formal setting. Two canvassers were sent out to collect for the Palestine Restoration Fund before the meeting was adjourned.<sup>57</sup> Almost the whole community were members of the Association, the tenets of the Zionist ideology being at the core of their belief.<sup>58</sup>

The committee was responsible for organizing numerous charitable events including bioscope evenings, concerts, social dances and teas to raise funds. Among the recipients of the earliest collections were the Jewish National Fund, the Keren Hayesod, and the Max Nordau Garden City Fund.<sup>59</sup> Guest speakers were brought to Potchefstroom to address the members. Among these was J Alexander, a representative of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, who praised the society for their good work and suggested a programme for their continued growth. He also explained the terms of the British Mandate over Palestine and answered numerous questions from the floor.<sup>60</sup> These social events were most frequently held at the Royal Hotel which provided ample accommodation and catering.<sup>61</sup> The Lyric Hall and Regent Café were also used for larger meetings and socials.

In 1921 the Jewish War Orphans Fund was added to the list of beneficiaries of the Society.<sup>62</sup> Within this group a sub-fund was created for the transference of orphans to

---

<sup>57</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 28 May 1919.

<sup>58</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Cash Books.

<sup>59</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 22 Oct 1919.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 6 Mar 1921.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 30 Mar 1921.

<sup>62</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 7 Apr 1921.

Palestine and £45 was contributed.<sup>63</sup> Although the society provided a platform for the airing of political views, its function was equally one of bringing the community together socially. It was at social gatherings, rather than political meetings that more funds were collected.

Membership of the Zionist Association and the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation overlapped. Rev. Cohen often addressed Zionist meetings. Cohen, like many of his counterparts throughout the country was a Balfour Zionist.<sup>64</sup> Like the Hebrew Congregation, the Zionist Association went to great lengths to collect membership dues often without much success. They were continually in financial crisis yet managed to run successfully from 1919 onwards. This was mainly due to the intense campaigning of Harry Finn and Freda Sack.<sup>65</sup> When the British Mandate over Palestine was finally ratified by the League of Nations in 1922 a special celebration was held to commemorate this historic event. A thanksgiving service was held in the Synagogue followed by a social that evening. Country members were invited as well as the communities of Klerksdorp and Ventersdorp. Members of the Young Israel Society, over the age of fifteen were also permitted to attend. The event was a resounding success.<sup>66</sup>

All milestones in the development of Jewish Palestine were celebrated, the most well attended of which was the lecture and social get-together commemorating the opening of the Hebrew University in 1925. Besides the usual invitees, the Mayor, the principal and staff of the Potchefstroom University and the principals of the local schools were invited.<sup>67</sup> Rev. W. J. de Klerk, Registrar of the Potchefstroom University College, wrote that "The Senate regret however, that they cannot send a delegate on that historic occasion but would like to congratulate your organization on the achievement of this significant landmark...."<sup>68</sup> Despite this letter the Rev de Klerk did attend the event and "expressed his conviction that the new University would be a light for the whole

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 29 Jul 1921.

<sup>64</sup> Inspired by the promise of the Balfour Declaration many Jews who had previously not supported the Zionist movement now joined its ranks.

<sup>65</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Cash Books 1919-1929.

<sup>66</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 25 July 1922.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. Book 12 Mar 1925.

<sup>68</sup> *The Zionist Record* 27 Mar 1927.

world.”<sup>69</sup> Prof. F. Postma, representing the Senate and Council of the Potchefstroom University College said that “the eyes of the whole world were on the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.”<sup>70</sup> The Mayor, Prof. S.P.E. Boshoff declared that “the Jews had made the greatest contribution to the culture of humanity, and that throughout their history they had displayed unity of interest.”<sup>71</sup>

It was felt that acceptance of the community by other religious denominations had finally been reached. Nahum Sokolow, secretary general of the World Zionist Congress, also drew a huge crowd when he passed through Potchefstroom and delivered a speech. He was presented with a set of Kruger coins and a box of “cholates” (sic) as a memento of his visit to the town.<sup>72</sup> The tenth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration was celebrated with a surprise party at the home of Mrs. Kantor and a profit of £5 was remitted to inscribe Lord Balfour in the Golden Book.<sup>73</sup>

Although the community was always short of funds they saw it their duty to generously assist charitable endeavours whenever they were able. On 28 June 1922 a joint meeting was held by the Hebrew Congregation, the Zionist Society and the Jewish Ladies’ Relief Fund “for the purpose of arranging parcels of food or money to be sent to the starving Jews in Russia.”<sup>74</sup> The £54 collected by the Synagogue and £62 collected by the Zionist Society were immediately sent to the Jewish Relief, Reconstruction and Orphans fund in Johannesburg.<sup>75</sup> The Ladies’ decided to hold a “bioscope evening” and a jumble sale to raise further funds. A door-to-door collection was made in the town. They gave generously to the fund. As almost all of the congregants had their roots and some remaining family members in Russia this cause was very close to their hearts. They had not forgotten their humble roots and beginnings. Many members of the community still

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 17 Jun 1926.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 3 Feb 1928.

<sup>74</sup> PHCMB 28 Jun 1922.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid and Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Book.

sent money home to relatives and institutions that they felt strongly about.<sup>76</sup> Their strong connection with *der Heim* persisted until the end of the Second World War.

As the community grew the Congregation had to provide a religious education for its young members. A *Talmud Torah* or Hebrew School was established. Funds were constantly lacking and it was difficult to maintain a full-time *cheder* teacher in Potchefstroom. The committee of the Hebrew Congregation decided to extend the duties of Rev. Cohen to that of teacher until the situation changed. He was already performing the duties of *shochet* but it was felt that he had the time and ability to teach the children as well.<sup>77</sup> In November 1922 it was clear that Rev. Cohen could no longer manage his many jobs. The School Committee stated that it was extremely difficult to find a Hebrew teacher as the pay was very poor. It was suggested that an assistant *shochet* be engaged and that he act also as Hebrew teacher.<sup>78</sup> After many interviews to find the correctly qualified individual, in June 1923, a Mr. Bernstein was given a month's trial in the post and paid £17-10-0.<sup>79</sup> A month later, after proving his capability, he was given a full-time position at £21 a month.<sup>80</sup>

School fees were set on a sliding scale of 10/- for one child, 15/- for two, 20/- for three, 27/-6d for four or more children. As most families had four or more children they would be paying the lowest rate but the greatest amount of money. Fees were collected annually though many members were only able to pay monthly installments. When a month's payment was missed, which was often the case, the child or children would be taken out of school until payments resumed. Sadly this was a regular occurrence and numerous children stayed at home until their parents were able to meet their commitment.<sup>81</sup> In the case of the Sandler brothers, who had been in arrears for a number of months, their daughters were sent home, while their sons were allowed to remain at school.<sup>82</sup> The

---

<sup>76</sup> PHCMB 28 Jun 1922.

<sup>77</sup> PHCMB 14 Feb 1920.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 20 Nov 1922.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 18 Jun 1923.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 29 Jul 1923.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 6 Jan 1926 and 13 May 1929 as examples.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 23 Jan 1926.

religious education of boys was clearly more highly valued than that of the girls.<sup>83</sup> This was another East European tradition that the community clung to, at least during this period. The school ran on a very tight budget and often had to be assisted with congregational funds set aside for other purposes.<sup>84</sup> It was only in 1928 that the *Talmud Torah* became affiliated to the South African Board of Jewish Education. An inspector was sent to check on the standard of teaching at the school and made suggestions where improvements might be made.<sup>85</sup> At this time the School Committee was abolished and all matters relating to the school were administered by the Synagogue committee.<sup>86</sup>

Secular education was equally as important to the community as was religious education. Enrolling their children in local schools allowed them to interact with other sectors of the population and gain a clear understanding of the host society. Records of the Potchefstroom Boys High School show that in 1914 there were approximately 30 Jewish boys in attendance. The numbers reached approximately 50 by 1929.<sup>87</sup> The new buildings for the Potchefstroom Girls High School were completed in 1914 and officially opened by the Resident Magistrate. Among those girls present at the celebration were Freda Sack, W Altmann, J Gluckmann, H Schwartz, Sara Wulfsohn and Florence Paynter. There were also two Jewish teachers at the school, Miss Woolf and Miss Gluckmann.<sup>88</sup> Historian, Phyllis Lewson, who attended the school from 1926 remembered the principal as being very strict and authoritarian. She also remembered some special teachers who helped inspire her later career.<sup>89</sup>

In 1925 Het Potchefstroomse Universiteitskollege voor Kristelike Hoger Onderwijs,<sup>90</sup> which had been established six years earlier, submitted a Private Bill before parliament “to the effect that the council of the College shall in the appointment or dismissal of any

<sup>83</sup> R Mendelsohn, *Sammy Marks 'Uncrowned King of the Transvaal'* p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> PHCMB 29 Jul 1923.

<sup>85</sup> PHCMB 28 Oct 1928.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 1 Dec 1928.

<sup>87</sup> Potchefstroom Boys High School Admissions Register.

<sup>88</sup> Potchefstroom Girls High School records.

<sup>89</sup> P Lewsen, *A Dance to the Discords of Time*, Privately Published Memoir, undated.

<sup>90</sup> The Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education was the successor to the Potchefstroom Theological Seminary was established by the Cachet brothers, who were born into a Dutch Jewish family but later converted to Christianity.

served on local committees and successfully liaised with local religious leaders and authorities. Throughout the Jewish communities of the small country towns there are similar examples of committed Rabbis who dedicated their lives to the service of their congregants and the furthering of their Jewish observance. It would be many years before a Rabbi of similar stature would be found for the community.<sup>97</sup>

A few months passed before the community found a replacement for Rev. Cohen. This was Rev. O. Altschuler, who came from Mir in Belarus and had qualified as a Froebel teacher,<sup>98</sup> served in Potchefstroom as Rabbi, chazzan and head of the Talmud Torah.<sup>99</sup> Altschuler represented the shift from the old world Rabbi to one who had a secular as well as religious education. The congregation hoped that this young Rabbi would be able to identify with the younger members of the community and keep them involved in Synagogue life. Altschuler shared his duties with an assistant, Rev D Gordon, who was also a *shochet*. He was paid £30 monthly while Gordon received £25.<sup>100</sup> The community was very satisfied with Altschuler and particularly enjoyed his lyric tenor voice and excellent teaching style. Sadly Altschuler had been offered a position in East London which he took up leaving Potchefstroom just after the High Holydays of 1927.<sup>101</sup> Although the community was unhappy with the way he had secretly gone about applying for other positions they presented him with a silver coffee set and bade him farewell.<sup>102</sup> It seems that many country Rabbis moved from town to town with great frequency. Better financial offers often tempted them away from their posts. Some Synagogue committees were harder to satisfy than others and there were often clashes between personalities which caused problems that could not be overcome. The country Rabbi had to be extremely diplomatic in order to maintain good relations with his congregation and hold onto his post. Often times the impetus to move on came from the Rabbi himself who might have been unhappy in his post and could no longer meet the demands of the community.

---

<sup>97</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 5 June 1925.

<sup>98</sup> "Froebelism" promoted the education of young children in the Kindergarten system.

<sup>99</sup> *South African Jewry* 1967-68. p. 172.

<sup>100</sup> PHCMB 7 Nov 1926.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 21 Jul 1927.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 24 Sep 1927.



After Altschuler's departure Rev. Gordon took over his many duties until a new Rabbi could be engaged. Harry Hirschmann, who had maintained close ties with his family and community in Latvia, corresponded with Rabbi Rabitz in Riga, in an attempt to find a suitably qualified candidate. Rev. M S Reichenberg, assistant Rabbi at the Great Synagogue in Riga, came highly recommended.<sup>103</sup> The committee wired £40 for his fare and a further £35 landing money.<sup>104</sup> The Board of Deputies' representative in Cape Town was requested to meet Reichenberg's ship and make sure that he was assisted in the immigration process.<sup>105</sup> Reichenberg arrived in Potchefstroom in September 1928 and was given a contract for a period of two years and two months at a monthly rate of £35. He was allowed two weeks annual holiday.<sup>106</sup> In January 1929 Reichenberg petitioned the community for a loan of £120 in order to bring his wife and eight children out to South Africa. The loan was granted provided that it be repaid at a rate of £5 per month. This was agreed to and his family arrived shortly thereafter.<sup>107</sup>

Even in the context of a community with strong links to *der Heim*, the following case is unique in the history of the Jews of Potchefstroom. William Kirsh had come to South Africa from Pokroy in Lithuania in 1904 aged 15. With his father, he worked as a produce dealer and frequently relocated to small towns in the Transvaal, including Randfontein, Pilgrims Rest, Rustenburg, Belfast, Bloemhof,<sup>108</sup> finally arriving in Potchefstroom at the request of his friend, Solomon Kantor, in 1922.<sup>109</sup> After achieving success in the operation of his malt factory he began looking for a bride. Friends in Potchefstroom mentioned a young woman in Lithuania whom they had known and he set off to meet her.<sup>110</sup> The marriage took place in Shavel in Lithuania in late August 1929<sup>111</sup> and after a four month absence he returned with his bride, Dveire, to begin married

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 25 Jun 1928.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 24 Jul 1928.

<sup>105</sup> PHCMB 20 Aug 1928.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 3 Sep 1928.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 10 Jan 1929.

<sup>108</sup> Applications for Naturalization of William Kirsh dated 1921 and 1938.

<sup>109</sup> PHCMB 16 April 1922.

<sup>110</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 7 Jun 1929.

<sup>111</sup> Ketubah of Woolf son of Noah Kirsh and Pese Dveire daughter of Zvi Arye Greenblatt, dated 21 August 1929.

life.<sup>112</sup> Local marriages usually took place at the Synagogue and occasionally in private homes. Often, when brides were from other towns the ceremonies were performed in their parents' Synagogues. Some marriages were still being arranged as they had been in Russia. It is not known whether there were any paid matchmakers in Potchefstroom.

Despite their moves towards secularization and assimilation the ability of Jews to integrate into South African society was questioned. As Shain points out, "unassimilability" together with Bolshevism were two factors which influenced the antisemitic movements in South Africa.<sup>113</sup> This was also a time of anti-Asiatic agitation which was especially common in Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp. Hostility towards Jews, especially in the smaller towns, was on the rise. Shortly after the Rand Rebellion in 1922 *Het Western* published a letter signed by "Volbloed Afrikaner" stating that "the Asiatic was the English and Jewish trader and shopkeeper." The Jewish trader was described as a "bloodsucker who ruins the farmer..."<sup>114</sup> In response to this outburst of hatred a reply was published in the *Potchefstroom Herald* and *Het Western* signed "Anti-Intolerance" (later discovered to be Freda Sack, honorary secretary of the Potchefstroom Zionist Society) where she enquired of "Volbloed Afrikaner":

"...how much he owes to the Jewish shopkeeper with whom he had dealings, and how long his account has been outstanding? In any event his charge that the Jewish trader ousts the farmer from his house and home and that the farmer becomes the by-woner is as ridiculous as it is untrue-. Could your 'Volbloed Afrikaner' substantiate his remarks with actual instances in which 'the Jew is the gentleman whilst the farmer is the servant'? I doubt it, and I would add that, far from being a menace to the farmer, the Jewish trader had helped him along, has given him credit from one season to another, helped him to tide over bad times by supplying him with the necessary living and farming requirements when lack of ready cash has prevented him from obtaining these elsewhere. How many

---

<sup>112</sup> Interview, D Friedman

<sup>113</sup> M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994, pp. 92-102.

<sup>114</sup> *Zionist Record* 31 Oct 1922.

insolvent Jewish 'outside store-keepers' do we find to-day with heavy irrecoverable book debts. The poor farmer simply cannot pay. What often does happen is that the farmer takes goods on credit at the Jewish store-keepers for years on end, buys his oxen, implements, his wagons and his household goods, never thinking of the 'days of reckoning', and when it comes to days of paying up, 'the blood-sucking Jew' is in evidence. Why cannot the muchly-wronged farmer look after his affairs and not allow 'unscrupulous, blood-sucking traders' to take advantage of him?... Did not his voortrekker ancestor push his way into the black man's domain or his forefather trader of the Dutch East India Company 'suck out' the native by buying up his land with a penknife a string of beads?"<sup>115</sup>

Significantly, Rev. M. L. Fick, the Nationalist candidate, who was contesting the seat for Potchefstroom, was accused of being antisemitic, during the General Election of 1924,. Addressing a meeting he "denied that he was anti-Hebrew. He knew his Bible too well for that, he added, causing great laughter when he said that he had great respect for Father Abraham's seed. He claimed that the Dutch farmers were great friends of the Jews. Neither they nor their leader (Hertzog) were antisemitic."<sup>116</sup> Lastly L Rosen, of Taaiboschspruit, reported to the Hebrew Congregation committee that "certain unsavory remarks were passed about Jews at a meeting of farmers held in the district." A sub-committee was appointed to look into the matter but nothing further was noted in connection with this event.<sup>117</sup>

Over the course of the decade the Jewish population of Potchefstroom had decreased from its highest number of 663 in 1921 to 520 in 1929<sup>118</sup>. The drop in numbers was probably the result of fewer immigrants arriving in the town and the stabilization of a once very mobile Jewish population. Jews were now more settled in South Africa, and although there was still movement between towns and cities, this had slowed considerably.

<sup>115</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 15 Sep 1922.

<sup>116</sup> *The Star* 6 Jun 1924.

<sup>117</sup> PHCMB 1 Nov 1925.

<sup>118</sup> *The Fourth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa 1929*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1929.

They built a strong foundation which would see them through the turbulence of the Great Depression, a surge in antisemitic violence and another World War.

## Chapter 6: Hard Times 1929-1945.

As the twenties came to a close, the economic prosperity experienced in South Africa and much of the Western World came to an abrupt halt as a result of the global financial crisis precipitated by the Wall Street Crash. Rural economies in South Africa were particularly hard hit and took longer than their urban counterparts to recover. The rise of fascism in Europe was of particular concern to local Jews who not only had family in those parts of the world but were also experiencing a rise in antisemitism in their own communities. The line between some form of local fascist movements and Afrikaner Nationalist became blurred. Immigration restrictions would also play a role in limiting newcomers to Potchefstroom. By this time the Jews of the town had built up a strong economic base and well functioning communal religious institutions.

The Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation numbered approximately 110 members in 1929.<sup>1</sup> Only the adult men of the community could hold membership to the Congregation. Many of these men were married with families. We can estimate that approximately 100 of these men were married and there were approximately three children per family<sup>2</sup>. These numbers account for almost all of the 520 Jews enumerated in the 1929 Union Census.<sup>3</sup> Clearly there were some people who identified themselves as Jews living in the town who were unaffiliated to the community although details of them have not been found.

With a growing number of children to accommodate, and a greater interest being shown in sporting activities and large social functions, it was decided to open a fund for the building of a Communal Hall adjoining the Synagogue. Almost nine years after its building, the bond on the New Synagogue had been fully paid off.<sup>4</sup> After almost a year of collecting, sufficient funds had been raised to go ahead with the building proposal and

---

<sup>1</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book 1929.*

<sup>2</sup> This number is derived from research into the various family groups that lived in the town.

<sup>3</sup> The Fourth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa 1929, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1929.

<sup>4</sup> PHCMB 13 May 1929.

£1250 (excluding electric lighting) was budgeted for the project. With the Great Depression at its very beginning, there were members of the community who were against the building project, and the remortgaging of the property. Some felt that the future was uncertain and the community might not be able to meet all expenses. In February 1930, the vote to go ahead with the building was carried 24 to 10.<sup>5</sup> In years to come this new building would host celebrations and also prove a source of revenue for the congregation.

On 17 September 1930 the foundation stone of the Communal Hall was laid by Rebecca Rachael Cowan (formerly Nathanson)<sup>6</sup>, who had contributed £100 to the building fund.<sup>7</sup> Beneath the foundation stone Jacob Shulman, the chairman, placed a glass bottle containing the names of the building committee, the Synagogue committee, and a blessing over the building.<sup>8</sup> The gathering was well attended and included the entire Jewish community, the Mayor, the Magistrate and a representative of the Police force. The crowd was addressed by Abraham M Abrahams, chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, who spoke on the Jewish contribution to civilization and their contribution to South Africa and Potchefstroom. It was hoped that the topic of the speech would go some way to reverse any antisemitic feeling which existed within the local community. The representation of dignitaries from the wider community shows that the Jews of the town were beginning to enjoy acceptance. Rather than merely being a Jewish event it had become a civic event taking the form of similar ceremonies throughout South Africa.<sup>9</sup> The Communal Hall was opened three months later, and although the two scheduled speakers, the mayor and Morris Kentridge,<sup>10</sup> were unable to attend, the crowd was addressed by Echiel Lurie, secretary of the Congregation. He explained that the hall had cost £1400 to erect and a further £400 to furnish. A ball was held in honour of the occasion where an extra £100 was raised to defray costs. Success was measured by the

---

<sup>5</sup> PHCMB 23 Feb 1930.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs Nathanson had formerly donated money for the building of the Synagogue building. Her late husband, Isaac Nathanson had been a successful General Dealer. They had no children

<sup>7</sup> PHCMB 8 Oct 1930.

<sup>8</sup> This document was discovered when the foundation stone was removed in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 19 Sep 1930.

<sup>10</sup> Morris Kentridge (1881-1964) was the MP for Fordsburg and later Troyville. He defended the Jewish community in Parliament against antisemitic agitation and opposed the various immigration restrictions which the government promulgated. He was also vice-President of the SA Zionist Federation.

fact that the dancing continued until after 2am.<sup>11</sup> It was decided that the Zionist Society and the Hebrew Order of David would be charged £1/1/- for the use of the Hall, while the ladies and children would be allowed to use the facilities free of charge.<sup>12</sup> The importance of the Zionist groups in these events clearly shows the centrality of Zionism within the community.

The ministers caused the community a great deal of trouble, both dealing with them and keeping them. Whether this was due to the difficult nature of the community or the ministers themselves is unknown. It seems clear that country communities were seen only as temporary posts until a better opportunity presented itself. When looking at the careers of many of these ministers it is possible to see how they moved around from area to area with some regularity. The incumbent in Potchefstroom, Rev. Reichenberg, was regularly censured for acting without the permission of the chairman.<sup>13</sup> He would often teach children without the sanction of the committee and regularly left *cheder* classes early. It was no surprise then, when in October 1930, he resigned.<sup>14</sup> It was felt that one minister could not satisfy the needs of the community and that the work should be divided between two. Rev. David Gordon (1888-1956), who came to South Africa from Minsk in 1923 and eventually settled in Queenstown was engaged as an assistant minister just prior to Reichenberg's departure. He was, however, only given a monthly contract in the hope that someone more able could be found to take his place.<sup>15</sup> In 1931, Reverends Israel Gutelevsky (1884-1955) and Reuben Schmukler (1885-1944), both recent immigrants from Russia, were engaged to assist with teaching and performing the slaughtering duties. Both were temporary posts and the relationship with each was fraught with problems.<sup>16</sup> Almost immediately Gutelevsky asked for a £2 salary increase which was grudgingly granted.<sup>17</sup> After three and half years Gutelevsky resigned from his post leaving the community without a *shochet*.<sup>18</sup> The following month a replacement was found in Rev.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 12 Dec 1930.

<sup>12</sup> PHCMB 18 Mar 1931.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 26 Jan 1930.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 8 Oct 1930.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 17 Aug 1930.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 27 Apr 1931.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* undated minute probably May 1935.

Isaac Chonowitz (1909-1959)<sup>19</sup> who was engaged for a year.<sup>20</sup> In the meantime, Rev. Schmukler, was unhappy with his salary and refused to conduct the High Festival services unless he received extra pay. Whether Schmukler remained with the community is unknown as he is not mentioned again in the congregational minutes.<sup>21</sup> It became clear that it would be very difficult to retain these Rabbinic services. Towns like Potchefstroom were seen by some of these ministers as minor stops until better offers were received. This problem would plague the community henceforth.

By January 1930 South Africa, with the rest of the world, was in the grip of an economic depression sparked by the Wall Street Crash of the previous year.<sup>22</sup> As Jews were disproportionately involved in commerce it was seen by many that these immigrants were taking jobs away from South Africans. In response to the Great Depression, the continuing “poor white”<sup>23</sup> problem and worsening anti-Jewish Afrikaner Nationalist sentiments, Dr. D. F. Malan, Minister for the Interior, tabled the Immigration Quota Bill in parliament, in January 1930. Under this Bill immigration would be restricted to fifty persons per quota country<sup>24</sup> per year. Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Russia, the main sources of Jewish immigration at the time, were targeted quota countries.<sup>25</sup> Under the title of “Pouring into the Union” the *Potchefstroom Herald* listed the annual statistics of immigrants arriving in South Africa and considered the position “Alarming.”<sup>26</sup> This clearly reflects the feeling of a certain section of the general community of the town. Reasons for the promulgation of the act were given as economic and the unassimilability of “some” groups.<sup>27</sup> Aligning itself with the rest of South African Jewry, a special meeting of the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation was called and it was decided to hold a mass protest against the Bill.<sup>28</sup> A resolution was passed stating that “This meeting

<sup>19</sup> Rev. Isaac Chonowitz (1909-1959).

<sup>20</sup> PHCMB Book 8 Jun 1935.

<sup>21</sup> PHCMB 8 Jun 1935.

<sup>22</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, p. 283.

<sup>23</sup> “Poor whites,” an economically impoverished group, made up about one fifth of the Afrikaner population.

<sup>24</sup> Quota countries were: Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Palestine, Poland and Russia.

<sup>25</sup> Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, pp. 102-109.

<sup>26</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 4 Feb 1930.

<sup>27</sup> M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, pp. 137-143.

<sup>28</sup> PHCMB 2 Feb 1930.



emphatically protests against the proposed Immigration Quota Bill on the grounds that it is based on unjust and illiberal principles because of its discrimination against particular races and creeds. This meeting is of the opinion that the admission of immigrants should be based upon their individual qualifications, character and conduct, and not upon the country of origin.”<sup>29</sup> Copies of the resolution were sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior.<sup>30</sup> In March the Congregation sent a donation to the Jewish Board of Deputies in the hope that legal action would be instituted against the Bill.<sup>31</sup> This was not to be and the Bill was passed in May.<sup>32</sup>

In 1932 the Jewish community challenged the parliamentary bill changing the name of the Potchefstroom University College to the Potchefstroom University College for Christian Higher Education. This name change inferred that only those of the Christian faith would be welcome to enter the College as staff or students. However, as previously discussed, the “Conscience Clause” of the University Act stated that “no religious test shall be imposed upon any person as a condition on being employed by, or a student at, any college.” The South African Jewish Board of Deputies took up the case against this change.<sup>33</sup> The Board petitioned the House of Assembly against the Bill stating “that it has hitherto been the policy of the Union that its university institutions should be of an undenominational character, and the Potchefstroom College is an integral part of the Union’s university system.”<sup>34</sup> As the university received much of its funding from government grants it was hoped the Bill would not be passed and that “Christian” would be removed from its title.<sup>35</sup> The second reading of the Bill came before parliament in April 1932 and after a long debate, in which it received strong opposition, it was passed 63 votes to 45. Morris Alexander, who spoke against the Bill, explained that the Jewish community had the greatest respect for their Christian neighbours and appealing the decision was based on the question of principle in higher education. He explained that “no Jew with any self-respect could send his son to a college labelled institution for

---

<sup>29</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 7 Feb 1930.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> PHCMB 25 Mar 1930.

<sup>32</sup> Saron p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 31 Dec 1931.

<sup>34</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 4 Mar 1932.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Christian Higher Education.”<sup>36</sup> Alexander was trying to prevent such a precedent from being set that might be extended to other educational institutions. The rector of the university felt insulted that the Jewish community was challenging the Bill and gave “my Jewish friends the assurance that there is no need whatever for them to be afraid.”<sup>37</sup> When the Bill came before parliament again, Alexander reiterated his objection “and remarked on the coincidence that its coat of arms should be Jewish – a seven branched candelabra known in Hebrew as a “Menorah.”<sup>38</sup> The Bill was eventually passed into Law. Alexander moved that the “Conscience Clause” remain in effect but this too was voted against 52 votes to 43.<sup>39</sup>

The 1930s saw a dramatic increase in antisemitism in South Africa, born out of the worsening economic crisis caused by the Great Depression, the rise of fascism in Germany and the growing strength of Afrikaner Nationalism. The coalition government of the National and South African Parties that took power in 1933 made clear their opposition to fascism. However, when Hertzog addressed a meeting at Potchefstroom in May 1933 “he opposed the anti-Nazi line taken by various sections of the population, ... and expressed a certain approval of the revolution taking place in Germany.”<sup>40</sup> The rise of the fascist movements in South Africa, which promoted the aims of National Socialism according to the German model, engendered distrust of the local Jewish community. These ideas appealed to the economically strained and especially the vulnerable farming community. In 1935 a meeting of the South African National Democratic Movement (Blackshirts), which was influenced by Nazi policies, took place at a farm in the Potchefstroom district.<sup>41</sup> The discussion centred around chasing “the Jews out of the Country.”<sup>42</sup> Speakers denounced Gen. Smuts as being partial to Jews over Christians and condemned the Mayoress of Potchefstroom for dancing with a “native” during a public ball. When this movement applied to hire the Town Hall for an “anti-Jewish”

<sup>36</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 19 Apr 1932.

<sup>37</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 26 Apr 1932.

<sup>38</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 14 Feb 1933.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid and “Potchefstroom University and the Conscience Clause”, by Special Correspondent in *Jewish Affairs*, Number 5, volume 4, 1950.

<sup>40</sup> M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* pp. 148-150.

<sup>41</sup> P J Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1991, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Die Westelike Stem* 23 Apr 1935.

demonstration they were refused and their leader Gen. Manie Maritz wrote to the Town Council recording the “insult.” The council could not show support for this organization and the Jewish community saw this action as a victory for their cause.<sup>43</sup> Movements such as these caused consternation among the Potchefstroom Jewish community especially as they never knew how far their threats would be taken.<sup>44</sup>

While dealing with issues from other quarters, the community also faced problems from within. In 1938 a leadership issue arose. Only Rev. Chonowitz remained in his role as *shochet*. He sometimes led services but this role had mainly fallen to lay members of the community. Hirsche Herr, stalwart of the community, was very well versed in religious learning and protocol and took it upon himself to lead services whenever a rabbinic official was not present. Those immigrants from Eastern Europe who had *Yeshiva* based educations were able to run services without assistance. However, they preferred to have paid officials run their institutions on their behalf. This was partly due to the fact that most community members spent long hours at work and did not want the added burden of forced communal work. They were also unconsciously modeling themselves on Christian communities which they had observed in the town. It was decided to seek a new *chazzan* and teacher and Rev. Baron was appointed to the post, again on a part time basis. The community was still hoping to find one “good man” who could fulfill all the necessary roles. They were prepared to pay a good salary in order to have some stability in the Synagogue.<sup>45</sup> In 1939 they approached the Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg in the hope that they could recommend a suitable candidate to take over the religious duties. The committee was greatly distressed when they received a reply to the effect that there was a shortage of ministers in the country and no candidates could be recommended.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that this was due to the immigration restrictions, which prevented Eastern Europeans from entering the country. Two months later Rev. Chonowitz resigned. Although the post of minister was advertised at a monthly salary of £45 no applications

---

<sup>43</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 30 Apr 1935.

<sup>44</sup> At this point there was no evidence of antisemitic violence.

<sup>45</sup> PHCMB 31 Jan 1938.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 25 Feb 1939.

were received.<sup>47</sup> Shortly thereafter Rev. Baron resigned.<sup>48</sup> Rev. Perlman was engaged for a period of three months while the community again tried to find a suitable candidate to assume all the necessary roles.<sup>49</sup> Apart from those very few who remained for longer periods, there was a clear pattern in the frequent movements of these rabbinical functionaries. The instability caused by this lack of continuity took its toll and the congregation and its members. This revolving door of restless reverends would be a continuous issue confronted by the community.

In May 1939 the committee excitedly reported that they had been approached by the dynamic young Rev. Abraham Morris Kaplan,<sup>50</sup> who had requested a meeting with them. Kaplan had come out to South Africa from Jerusalem, where he was born, and had been successful in all of his previous positions. After the interview and the checking of his credentials the committee decided to agree to his request of £50 monthly and a year long contract was duly signed.<sup>51</sup> He would begin serving the congregation at the beginning of January 1940.<sup>52</sup> Rev. A. M. Kaplan had studied at the Rabbinical College in Jerusalem and obtained *Smicha* (rabbinical ordination) at the age of 18. In Berlin he studied music and singing. Having arrived in South Africa in 1914 he served the communities of Oudtshoorn, Boksburg, Jeppestown, Johannesburg and Kroonstad before arriving in Potchefstroom.<sup>53</sup> Kaplan took up his post with great enthusiasm and was immediately welcomed into the community. Not only would he act as Rabbi, but also teacher, *mohel*, *chazzan*, *shochet* and cultural advisor to the Zionist Association.<sup>54</sup> In October of that year Kaplan was also appointed Chaplain to the Military Camp.<sup>55</sup> He remained with the community for four years, resigning in 1944 to take up a post in East London.<sup>56</sup> Kaplan's replacement came in the form of Rev. Rozovsky who only lasted in Potchefstroom for a

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 13 Mar 1939.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. undated minute.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Kaplan, who was born in Jerusalem in 1896, was the grandson of Rev. J. M. East, referred to earlier. Although East was long dead, the relationship was noted by the older members of the community.

<sup>51</sup> PHCMB, undated minute, probably early May 1939.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 4 Jul 1939.

<sup>53</sup> Biographical Sketch, undated.

<sup>54</sup> PHCMB, 2 Jan 1940, 8 Sep 1940, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Nov 1940.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 28 Feb 1944.

month.<sup>57</sup> He was soon replaced by Rev. Kur who also stayed for a short period.<sup>58</sup> Then in mid-1944 Rev. Golub took up the post and he stayed on for three years.<sup>59</sup> This regular changing of Rabbis had a disheartening effect on the community who lost a sense of continuity. Each new Rabbi brought new ideas with him and wanted to change the systems put in place by his predecessor. The logistics of these changes became complicated especially if the Rabbi only planned to be with the community for a short while.

Not only did the committee of the Congregation continually have to deal with the problem of finding a suitable minister but also with apathy from within its own ranks. Committee meetings often had to be cancelled as there was no quorum present. This was put down to members showing little interest in communal affairs.<sup>60</sup> It seems likely that commitments to business, family and social engagements kept members occupied and away from meetings. All of these point towards the continued secularization of the community. As time progressed many members slackened in their religious observance and it became harder to draw them more regularly into the Synagogue.<sup>61</sup> Committee members were chided for discussing private business outside of meetings. The chairman demanded that “no secrets in committee be divulged. Any committee-man doing so was to resign forthwith.”<sup>62</sup> This was a forlorn hope. Gossip was a part of small-town life and regularly the cause of rifts within families and the various committees.

Even the more social gatherings suffered as a result of attendance problems. It was found difficult to get the community to attend talks given by visiting lecturers. On one occasion the Jewish Relief Fund requested their emissary, Lord Morley, be received in Potchefstroom to deliver a lecture. The committee replied that the turnout would be so poor it was not worth his while making the journey.<sup>63</sup> Apart from poorly attended committee meetings Rev. Golub complained that morning and evening services were

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 9 Mar 1944.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. undated minute probably Apr 1944.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 17 Oct 1944.

<sup>60</sup> PHCMB 25 Aug 1935, 25 Aug 1936, etc.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, see all minutes for 1935, 1936, 1937, etc.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 19 Oct 1930.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. undated minute, probably December 1938.

often cancelled as it was difficult to make up a *minyan*. He requested that a rotational system be put in place so that every member of the community was expected to attend a *minyan*. This was not agreed to by the committee.<sup>64</sup> The idea was a good one but the people were not able or willing to set aside as much time as was necessary.

From the time of the building of the Communal Hall the community had problems making ends meet. The depression played an important role in the financial trouble as did member apathy. Throughout the 1930's and early 1940's the financial books of the congregation show various cash shortfalls. Bonds were raised against the various properties and the bank was approached for an overdraft.<sup>65</sup> It was only December 1945 that the committee could proudly announce that they had finally finished paying off the bond lodged against the Communal Hall.<sup>66</sup> This was a significant achievement in light of the financial stresses experienced by the community and its members. In view of the difficult position they had found themselves in during the 1930s the Synagogue Committee wrote to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies requesting that they stop sending *michulochim* (fundraisers) to Potchefstroom.<sup>67</sup> Fundraising drives were often met with failure in the early 1930s.<sup>68</sup> More often than not the subscription collectors would return to committee meetings empty handed. It was only in the early 1940s that there were favorable reports that collections "were excellent."<sup>69</sup>

One of the most successful concerts was given by Gershon Sirota, a noted Russian Cantor who toured mainly in America. He was allowed the use of the school and the lights but the committee could guarantee no money. His well publicized visit "cleaned up" and he later wrote to thank the community for his great success there.<sup>70</sup> When Morris Alexander, a leading communal figure, MP, and Chairman of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, addressed the community the majority of tickets to the meeting went unsold

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 19 Aug 1945.

<sup>65</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books 1929-1945.

<sup>66</sup> PHCMB 11 Dec 1945.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 1 Feb 1931.

<sup>68</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books 1930-1935.

<sup>69</sup> PHCMB 6 Nov 1941.

<sup>70</sup> PHCMB 11 Dec 1929.

and were eventually given away.<sup>71</sup> There was, however, a large turnout at a special service held in memory of King George V, and it was noted that if tickets had been sold the congregation's overdraft would have been considerably reduced.<sup>72</sup> This was a clear sign of loyalty to the Crown and shows that this immigrant community had embraced their surrounding culture and its icons. This occurred both naturally as acculturation took place within the immigrant community and also by the conscious efforts made by the immigrant community to assimilate into host society. It became apparent that the community preferred entertainment to intellectual talks. With this in mind it was decided that the best way to raise funds was through social events, card evenings and dances. These were well attended and those who joined in were prepared to pay for tickets.<sup>73</sup> Bazaars and raffles also drew attention from the Jewish and general communities who contributed generously. It was at these public events that the Jewish and Gentile communities mingled. Although there was mixing between them in daily business transactions the Jewish community generally remained socially apart from the broader population of the town. Despite their need to be accepted in wider society the Jews of the town clung steadfastly to their cultural identities and especially the older generation preferred to socialize within their own group. The children of the community who had gone through the school system were more comfortable with their non-Jewish peers and their circles of friendship represented a wider spectrum of socio-economic and religious backgrounds.<sup>74</sup>

By the 1930s religious education was seen as very necessary component in the upbringing of the community's children. The secular education was of primary importance so that the children would have the ability to compete on all levels with their peers. However their religious and cultural identity had to be instilled out of school. This is where the *cheder* now played an important role. One of the most important functions of the Synagogue Committee was seeing to the Jewish Education of the children. The running of the Hebrew School was a constant strain on the committee. The standard of

---

<sup>71</sup> PHCMB 25 Nov 1935.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 21 Jan 1938.

<sup>73</sup> See for example *Potchefstroom Herald* 27 Jun 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Various interviews, see J Waks, R Shakinovsky, T Miller.

teaching depended on the capability of the minister and as the ministers changed on regular basis there was little continuity at school. When Revs Schmukler and Gutelevsky were in charge they were continually arguing over their duties and shuffling their classes around, with very little being achieved. The syllabus which they were given by the Jewish Board of Education did not suit them and they quickly discarded it.<sup>75</sup> In the meantime, the Synagogue Committee felt that if those children who attended the school were given prizes others might want to join in. A prize giving ceremony was arranged but sadly this had no effect on levels of attendance.<sup>76</sup> Later the Hebrew School was visited for the first time by the Inspector of Hebrew Education. He examined the class “and the report was not favourable.” It was decided that the matter would be given greater attention after “Yontof [Jewish Holy Day]”.<sup>77</sup> A year later it was reported that there were around 30 children at the school but attendance continued to be very irregular.<sup>78</sup> The problem of maintaining the cheder was not unique to Potchefstroom and it seems that many of the smaller community had similar issues.<sup>79</sup> In communities with young children there was no option but to persevere with Jewish education, even if it was of a poor quality.

When Rev. Kaplan took up his position in 1940 he reorganized the Hebrew School and his energy and enthusiasm was noted by the committee members. Kaplan reported that there were 32 children divided into three classes. Irregular attendance was still the most significant problem. It is clear from the small number of pupils compared with the large population that perhaps only about half of the community’s children were attending.<sup>80</sup> This is most likely due to more exciting extra mural activities and a further move towards assimilation. It is also probable that the majority of students were boys preparing for the *Bar Mitzvah* classes. In December 1943 the Hebrew School Committee was established and although it reported directly to the committee of the Hebrew Congregation it was felt that this group would be able to keep a closer eye on the school. At the first meeting of

---

<sup>75</sup> PHCMB 18 Mar 1935.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 22 Oct 1935.

<sup>77</sup> PHCMB 7 Sep 1936.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 18 Oct 1937.

<sup>79</sup> M E Katz, *The History of Jewish Education in South Africa 1841-1980*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1980.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 2 Apr 1940.



the committee it was resolved that each parent pay 10/- per month per child and 5/- per month for every extra child attending school. The committee decided to visit the school on a regular basis and carefully monitor the teaching, attendance, and discipline of the pupils.<sup>81</sup> All of these measures were put in place in the hope that the school would finally be run properly and the children of the community would benefit from this institution.

When Rev. Golub arrived in August 1944 he was immediately addressed by the Committee who acquainted him with their aims and objectives. A new syllabus was drawn up in accordance with that provided by the Jewish Board of Education.<sup>82</sup> Among the subjects taught, were Jewish History, Bible Study, and Hebrew Language. The Jewish History syllabus had a Zionist slant as Zionism remained one of the core features of South African Jewish identity.<sup>83</sup> One of the new initiatives that were brought in was that reports be presented to parents at the end of each term. An attendance register was to be kept and absentees were to bring “excuses” from their parents. An appeal was sent out to parents imploring them to send their children to the Hebrew School.<sup>84</sup> None of these measures seemed to be effective as only twenty pupils attended the Hebrew School at this time. It was felt that sporting commitments were more important to the children than religious instruction.<sup>85</sup> There was a clear tension between the attractiveness of the host society and culture and Jewish commitments. This was yet another move towards secularization.<sup>86</sup>

Of all the communal activities that took place within the Jewish community it was the Zionist Association that was ultimately the most successful. Initially meetings were held infrequently and expenses often exceeded income.<sup>87</sup> A new fundraising scheme was proposed. Voluntary members would hold small gatherings at their homes, inviting guests and asking for donations. These usually took the form of teas or card evenings and

---

<sup>81</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew School Minute Book 21 Dec 1943.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 27 Aug 1944.

<sup>83</sup> Interview M Seligman.

<sup>84</sup> Potchefstroom Hebrew School Minute Book 16 Jan 1945.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 4 Aug 1945 and 22 Oct 1945.

<sup>86</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain. *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>87</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 6 May 1929.

were found to bring in variable amounts for the charities that the Association supported.<sup>88</sup> It was clearly the social interaction that drew members of the community to these meetings. There was little entertainment in small communities of South Africa during this period and these events were welcome distractions.

Although members often donated to the various charitable causes they did not keep up their subscription payments.<sup>89</sup> Continued lack of interest and funds prompted the committee of the Association to reorganize itself in the hope of attracting a greater paying membership. The local committee who were in constant contact with their head office in Johannesburg asked for assistance. P. Cornfeld, an emissary from the Zionist Federation in Johannesburg came to Potchefstroom to help with the restructuring of the committee and made various suggestions to those present.<sup>90</sup> It seems that the suggestions were those which the committee had already tried out and the visit was considered a failure. Throughout the early 1930s attendance at the various meetings remained poor and all attempts to remedy the situation appear to have failed.<sup>91</sup> It was only when very popular guest speakers came to Potchefstroom, that the Association had a good response to meetings. It remained difficult to hold the attention of the members, most of whom worked long hours and preferred to spend their evening with their families or friends. The majority of the community did not have spare money in the early 1930s and this prevented many from making donations.

By bringing out international notables it was hoped that their speeches and interaction would inspire members of the local communities to give more freely of their time and savings. The constant round of lectures also continued to keep the interest in the Association alive in the hearts and minds of those less connected with Jewish life. Colonel Wedgwood, a British statesman, who had participated in the process of the Balfour Declaration, was well received in Potchefstroom. He was a pro-Zionist who travelled the world lecturing on post-Balfour Palestine. Their visit was the first that was

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 15 May 1930.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 8 Mar 1931.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. Sep 1931.

arranged by telephone rather than by the distribution of circulars.<sup>92</sup> When Dr. Chaim Weizmann,<sup>93</sup> President of the World Zionist Organization, visited the town the Jewish communities of Klerksdorp, Maquassi, Wolmaranstad, Parys, Welverdiend, Vredefort, Kopies, Ventersdorp, Fochville, Viljoenskroon and Lichtenburg attended his speeches and the receptions given in his honour. Residents of these very small towns often relied on their counterparts in the larger centres, like Potchefstroom, for entertainment. The Mayor welcomed Weizmann and his wife to the town and proceeded to explain that their decision to come to Potchefstroom was a good one as the community was “very well-to-do.”<sup>94</sup> This perception is interesting to note as, on the whole, the Jews of the town were no more “well-to-do” than the other sectors of the general community. However the common stereotypes persisted.<sup>95</sup> The Magistrate interrupted by agreeing “that the Jewish community was well-to-do but he hoped, he said, that the visitors would not take too much money out of Potchefstroom.” Then councilor Kerswill, seizing the opportunity, replied that there “were many very poor people in Potchefstroom” and made an appeal on their behalf, in an attempt to overshadow Weizmann’s appeal for the Palestine Relief Fund.<sup>96</sup> Weizmann quickly reworked his speech and explained “that Jews contributed in full measure to the success of the town and country in which they lived, but over and above that they still found it possible to help towards their own funds.”<sup>97</sup> Although the turnout was a great success in terms of the crowds that had come to listen to Weizmann, the collection itself was a failure in light of the remarks made by the others. However, at the reception and dance that followed, a further £600 was raised for the Palestine Relief Fund.<sup>98</sup> It had been twenty years since the Balfour Declaration. The establishment of a Jewish State, which was so close to the hearts of those affiliated with the Zionist movement, seemed very far away. However, throughout the Jewish world, they persevered and continued to collect money to achieve their aims.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 1 Feb 1930.

<sup>93</sup> Later the first President of the State of Israel.

<sup>94</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 18 Mar 1932.

<sup>95</sup> M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, pp. 58-64.

<sup>96</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 18 Mar 1932.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book Apr 1932.

<sup>99</sup> Shimoni, p. 237.

In the mid 1930s, as the economy improved membership of the Zionist Association began growing in response to fundraising and membership drives. As Jewish life in Germany was becoming more restrictive, it seemed clear that a homeland in Palestine was becoming an urgent necessity. Although the larger proportion of donated funds went to Zionist causes the Association also sent a number of large donations to the German Jews Relief Fund.<sup>100</sup> With Louis Klivjansky as secretary a new energy was brought to campaigning and fund-raising.<sup>101</sup> He proved that strong leadership was key to the success of the organization. An entertainment committee was established to take care of regular fund raising drives.<sup>102</sup> However, in 1935 there was still no one from the Association willing to represent Potchefstroom at the Annual Zionist Congress.<sup>103</sup> Although numbers of membership remained fairly stable a few of the more involved members were leaving Potchefstroom and were not being replaced. Reasons for their departure were given as mainly economic, and a number of female members left in order to marry. It was often through conferences and social gatherings in other towns that prospective matches were made.<sup>104</sup>

With Hitler's rise to power and the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Germany fewer countries were allowing refugees entry. The Aliens Act of 1937 was passed further restricting German Jewish immigration to South Africa. Now refugees, escaping the ever tightening noose of fascism, were targeted. The following year it was recorded that an Austrian refugee approached the community requesting financial assistance. This unnamed gentleman was given £2/2/- by the Congregation.<sup>105</sup> The community felt very strongly about assisting those who were able to escape from Europe and reach South Africa. Many still had family who were unable to leave due to all the immigration restrictions that were being promulgated across the Western world.

---

<sup>100</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Cash Books 1933-1936.

<sup>101</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 7 Sep 1933.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 15 May 1934.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 7 Apr 1935.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 31 Oct 1935.

<sup>105</sup> PHCMB 25 Jul 1938.

In 1939 the Zionist Association was again reorganized in the hope of improving funding. Although charitable drives had become very successful membership dues were still not being paid.<sup>106</sup> This was partly due to the establishment of the Women's Zionist League (WIZO) which split the membership of the Association.<sup>107</sup> Under the new system members were informed that subscriptions would no longer be collected. They would rather be required to pay membership fees on an annual basis.<sup>108</sup> This new measure seems to have failed as the chairman, Harry Finn, continued to make up the monthly shortfall in order to pay outstanding debts.<sup>109</sup> Even the Hebrew study group where, it was hoped members would learn Hebrew as a living language, failed.<sup>110</sup> Most preferred to stick to Yiddish, their mother tongue, rather than learn a new language. Only the very few who one day hoped to live in the Jewish state were willing to learn Hebrew. This was mainly the younger generation. When conversing with one another the older, immigrant generation spoke Yiddish. Although they were drawn from different parts of Eastern Europe, with different dialects of Yiddish, they clearly able to understand each other. Many had learnt Afrikaans and English and spoke these languages with a heavy foreign accent. Children remember their parents conversing with them in a combination of English and Yiddish. Although the children understood Yiddish they spoke mainly in English and Afrikaans. This move to learn and be fully conversant in the language of the host society shows how the younger generation of Potchefstroom Jewry were becoming assimilated.

When South Africa declared War on Germany on 3 September 1939 Potchefstroom was again drawn into the proceedings as the military camp was reopened as a training centre for recruits. This time the community was well prepared and made special provision for the Jewish soldiers visiting the town.<sup>111</sup> With so many soldiers stationed there during the war years there was once again renewed economic opportunity in Potchefstroom. During the first months of the War the religious needs of the Jewish soldiers were taken care of

<sup>106</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 13 Nov 1939.

<sup>107</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 18 Feb 1938.

<sup>108</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 31 Jan 1940.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 15 May 1941.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 22 Mar 1945.

<sup>111</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, p. 120.

by a traveling Chaplain, Rev. I. Levinson, who was responsible for all the training camps in the Transvaal. He was “very much impressed by the adequate and well-organized arrangements at the hospital, and I am highly gratified at the healthy condition of the men, their fine spirit, and the discipline and general orderliness and courtesy pervading the Camp.”<sup>112</sup> Later Rev. Kaplan of the Congregation was appointed Chaplain to the troops at the camp.<sup>113</sup>

The community rallied around the soldiers and worked tirelessly to boost their morale. When soldiers attended Synagogue services they were allocated a family who provided them with a good meal and a warm reception.<sup>114</sup> Rev. Kaplan directed his sermons to the soldiers and spoke of the peaceful nature of the Jewish people and “how if mankind followed the teachings of the Scriptures there could be no war.”<sup>115</sup> At the first Annual General Meeting of the Potchefstroom Jewish Community Soldiers’ Recreation Club, its chairman, Dr. Singer, “thanked all those who had supported the club financially and above all the Jewish lady workers, who had worked unselfishly and untiringly in order to entertain troops.” He further stated that “The Jewish Community is doing its very best to make the life of the soldier in Potchefstroom a little brighter and happier. All troops stationed in Potchefstroom have always found a home where everything possible is being done for their comfort and amusement in the Jewish Communal Hall.” During its first year the club had entertained 18000 troops, poured about 25000 cups of tea, served 20000 fruit salads, 15000 ice-creams and 8000 plates of sandwiches and cakes, all free of charge.<sup>116</sup> Later 1/- was levied for entry and the proceeds donated to various War charity funds.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 30 Aug 1940.

<sup>113</sup> PHCMB 23 Jan 1941.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 18 Mar 1943.

<sup>115</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 6 Sep 1940.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 12 Dec 1940.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 30 Oct 1942.

Demonstrating their loyalty to the country, many young men from the South African Jewish community joined the armed forces.<sup>118</sup> Rev. Kaplan stated: “We are exceedingly pleased to say that practically every Jewish home in Potchefstroom has given one or two (in some houses even more) soldiers to the army. We are proud of those boys who have enlisted. In doing so they are upholding the tradition and the loyalty of our people to the State.”<sup>119</sup> Kaplan certainly exaggerated the number of recruits but this does not detract away from the fact that many did sign up. Almost all of them men were a new generation of South African born Jews.<sup>120</sup>

Needless to say, antisemitism was ever present in Potchefstroom. The Great Trek centenary celebrations of 1938 had sparked a nationwide wave of Afrikaner nationalism. The paramilitary Ossewabrandwag movement, established during this time, soon became the main fascist mouthpiece in South Africa.<sup>121</sup> By the time that the War broke out in 1939 the fascist Ossewabrandwag movement had taken a strong hold in the Potchefstroom district. During February 1940 a number of Jewish stores were looted, with some bombed and burned.<sup>122</sup> The Jewish Communal Hall was also set alight and sustained major damage.<sup>123</sup> Although the police never apprehended any of the suspects the community believed that one of the commandos of the Ossewabrandwag was behind these acts of arson.<sup>124</sup> In March 1940 members of the community received a mass mailing of a cartoon depicting Hitler with an exhausted and wild expression. The hand-writing below which simply stated in Afrikaans “With compliments from your trusted friend” could not be identified.<sup>125</sup> Letters were later received containing swastikas but the source of these was again unknown.<sup>126</sup> In light of the arson and antisemitic letter writing campaign, a service was held at the Synagogue calling for the unity of the Jewish and

---

<sup>118</sup> Among those who enlisted were: Rev. Cecil Bloch, Jeffrey Brasch, Maurice Finn, Dr Arkie Frame, Paul Heller, Joe Jedeiken, Alec Judelsohn, Hyman Katz, Robin Meyerowitz, Philip Miller, Monty Perel, Norman Rosenthal, Dr B Singer, Hyman and Sadie Starfield, Sol Suchet, and Simon and Teddy Waks.

<sup>119</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 13 Sep 1944.

<sup>120</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 118-131.

<sup>121</sup> Furlong p 111.

<sup>122</sup> Interviews with Bortz, Waks, Shulman, Singer, Miller, Herr.

<sup>123</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 16 Feb 1940.

<sup>124</sup> Interviews with Bortz, Waks, Shulman, Singer, Miller, Herr.

<sup>125</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 29 Mar 1940.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 5 Apr 1940.

Gentile communities. Rev. Kaplan, in an attempt at calm the panicked community, lectured that “at a time like this, all racialism and personal bitterness must be eschewed. They must remember that there was One above all, and that they were all children of One Father.”<sup>127</sup> Very few reports about these events appeared in the local press. However, the memory of the Jewish residents of Potchefstroom who lived through this period is filled with the panic and horrors that they experienced. In light of the horrors of the Holocaust and all that fascism represented, these memories have remained vivid and have coloured the images that former residents have of the town. They have been left with a sense of mistrust of fellow townsfolk especially those who were known Ossewabrandwag sympathizers. Furthermore there was a feeling of anger that the perpetrators were never brought to account for the misdeeds. It is this sad period in the history of the Jewish community that evokes the most passion and anger when being recounted by former residents.

As the War progressed most of the community feared for the safety of their family members who remained in Europe. While South African forces were fighting in North Africa and Europe, parents in Potchefstroom were faced with the distress of knowing that some of their sons might be taken captive or killed by the enemy. Maurice Finn was taken prisoner by Rommel’s Afrika Corps at Fort Mechili in 1941 and spent the rest of the war in POW camps and Stalags in Germany before being liberated by the Russian Army in 1945.<sup>128</sup> Joe Jedeiken was captured by the Germans at Sidi Rezegh. When he reached a P.O.W. camp in Italy he was allowed to send postcards to his parents reporting on his condition and reassuring them that he was well.<sup>129</sup> He was released in April 1945.<sup>130</sup> Alec Judelsohn also spent much of the War in POW camps and Stalags after being captured in a valiant fight during the North Africa campaign.<sup>131</sup> Robin Meyerowitz was also captured in 1942 and suffered the same fate as Finn, Jedeiken and Judelsohn.<sup>132</sup> There were also those who did not return home. Monty Perel was killed in Italy in

---

<sup>127</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 30 May 1940.

<sup>128</sup> Interview Maurice Finn.

<sup>129</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 1 May 1942.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 13 Apr 1945.

<sup>131</sup> Interview Alec Judelsohn.

<sup>132</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 10 July 1942.



1944.<sup>133</sup> Norman Rosenthal fell during the defense of Sidi Rezegh in 1942.<sup>134</sup> Hyman “Sonny” Starfield, a member of the South African Air Force died at sea in 1945.<sup>135</sup>

Back at home, the problems of running the Zionist Association were finally eclipsed by the remarkable success they had in raising funds. It was reported that between 1936 and 1944 they had collected £17000 which were contributed to various Zionist charities.<sup>136</sup> The stability of the community and the economic upswing experienced during the War, due mainly to the reestablishment of the Military Training Camp in the town, were now showing themselves in financial terms. Clearly there were numerous members of the community who were more comfortable giving donations rather than attending meetings. The campaign of 1941 had raised £1400 in its first week alone.<sup>137</sup> The War Appeal Campaign<sup>138</sup> as well as those for the Friends of the Hebrew University<sup>139</sup> and the Youth Aliyah sent representatives to Potchefstroom to thank the community for their continuous generous support.<sup>140</sup> In an effort to unite two competing charitable institutions it was decided to invite the committee of the WIZO to unify the Zionist organizations. Although they agreed not to work against each other the WIZO preferred to maintain its independence.<sup>141</sup>

On 17 October 1945 the Potchefstroom Jewish Ladies Society was replaced by Potchefstroom Branch of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa. This was a nationwide organization of Jewish women working for the upliftment of both the Jewish and general communities, which was founded in South Africa in 1931. The outgoing committee was thanked for their “valuable work” and it was hoped that the new organization “would continue to give valuable services to the best of its ability.”<sup>142</sup> All 22 ladies who attended the meeting were appointed to the committee. Attendance was

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 11 Aug 1944.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 23 Jan 1942.

<sup>135</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 31 Aug 1945.

<sup>136</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 25 Jan 1945.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 3 Feb 1941.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 11 Mar 1941.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 29 Jun 1942.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 24 May 1944.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 14 May 1945.

<sup>142</sup> Union of Jewish Women Minute Book 17 Oct 1945.

considered small and it was hoped that many more ladies from the community could be co-opted onto the committee.<sup>143</sup> It was immediately decided to begin work with the “Native Soup Kitchen and Nurseries” and a drive for the collection of old clothes and toys for the nurseries was planned. They were also sent a donation of £5/5/-. This was one of the first recorded interactions between the Jewish and Black communities in Potchefstroom. A roster of ladies was drawn up for Christmas stamp sales at the Post Office.<sup>144</sup> Here again, social interaction between the Jewish and host communities became more common place. This was the beginning of a very well organized charitable group who worked extremely hard raising money for the betterment of those less fortunate than themselves.

The period under exploration shows the tenacity of the immigrant and South African born generations and their ability to overcome the many obstacles which lay in their path. Despite indifference and the challenging financial situation the institutions of the community survived intact. Most members were by now on a firm financial footing and well established in the town. Their sons were returning from war to begin their lives afresh. Tragically the family connections severed by the Holocaust would never be rebuilt and the connection to *der Heim* was gone forever. The antisemitism which they had experienced was now at an end. From now on their most difficult obstacle to overcome would be that of residents leaving the town for the big cities.

---

<sup>143</sup> Union of Jewish Women Minute Book 17 Oct 1945.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 11 Nov 1945.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **The Post War Years 1945-1967**

At the close of the War it was learnt that six million European Jews there had been murdered. It would be many months before the authorities had accounted for the comparatively few survivors. Almost every member of the Potchefstroom Jewish Community knew of family and friends who had perished in the Holocaust. Jews throughout South Africa and the world would have to deal with this loss. Every anti-Jewish or antisemitic event which would occur in the future, or would be remembered from the past, would now pale in comparison with the Holocaust, at least in the eyes of the Jewish community. At the very same time as this traumatic news was filtering out of Europe, battle-weary soldiers were returning home to their families after six long years at War. Great excitement and a sense of relief was expressed by community members who now welcomed these heroes back into society. As soon victory was declared a service of thanksgiving was held at the Synagogue.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, this was followed by a day of mourning, to remember those murdered in Europe. These two very different services were held in all Synagogues throughout South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Many of those who lived in Potchefstroom during the war years had achieved financial success. As a result the congregation and its members found themselves on a strong financial footing. It was now that the community would face its most serious obstacle. Together with most small communities Potchefstroom faced the departure of Jews from its ranks to the big cities. It was natural that when better opportunities presented themselves, these would draw community members to the larger cities. Johannesburg was the main centre to attract Jews away from Potchefstroom. The Hebrew Day School system was established in Johannesburg with the founding of King David School in 1947 and drew many of the young members of the community from the town. Here Hebrew and Jewish Studies with a focus on Zionism were taught along side secular subjects. Communal amenities were more easily accessible in Johannesburg and there was a greater community with which to interact. Almost half South Africa's Jewish population was situated in this city and this was an important

---

<sup>1</sup> Interviews: J Waks, A Judelsohn, L Herr.

<sup>2</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, p. 124.

attraction for Potchefstroom's Jews.<sup>3</sup> A similar exodus was noted among others in the Pietersburg Jewish community.<sup>4</sup>

Assimilation continued to take its toll on communal activity. While the younger generation involved itself in many more secular activities, the main one being sport, the older, more committed, immigrant generation began to slowly die out. Most members of the congregation were now paying fees, yet as previously experienced, attendance at synagogue services remained low. During the week it was often impossible to make a *minyan* and services were regularly cancelled.<sup>5</sup> When there was a greater attendance at services it was found that poorer members were occupying more expensive seats and this caused an outcry from those who had paid for these seats. Clearly this class divide remained an irritant for the community. In this case copies of the by-laws of the congregation were sent out to offending members.<sup>6</sup> The congregation could now afford to give Rev. Golub a car and a petrol allowance to facilitate the attendance of his communal duties. He was also reprimanded for not attending certain *shiva* houses which was part of his duty.<sup>7</sup>

In 1946 the Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation, following other congregations across the country, affiliated itself to the South African Union of Orthodox Congregations. It was hoped that in this way there would be religious uniformity among these many congregations. Previously all congregations had been run according to the wishes of their members and there was a vast difference between observance levels in the various communities. There was also no process of accreditation for the many country Rabbis who seemed to float from post to post. This uniting of all congregations under one umbrella organization would hopefully redress these matters.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, , *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 154-156.

<sup>4</sup> C Wiener, *The History of the Pietersburg (Polokwane) Jewish Community*, MA Thesis, UNISA, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> PHCMB 1 September 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 19 October 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 11 December 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 13 August 1946.

Finally all bonds had been repaid and the financial affairs of the congregation were considered “healthy”.<sup>9</sup> As there was no *cheder* teacher and surplus fund were available the post was advertised in the Jewish newspapers.<sup>10</sup> It took nine months to find the appropriate candidate and Rev. Max Stein was appointed to the post. His duties included slaughtering to be carried out at the abattoir.<sup>11</sup> In April 1947 Rev. Golub resigned his post.<sup>12</sup> The community immediately engaged the services of Rev. Shalom Coleman.<sup>13</sup> Coleman had graduated from Liverpool University with a BA in Hebrew, Ancient Semitic Languages and Egyptology. During the War he had served as the Welfare and Liaison Officer of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. Like Kaplan before him, Coleman brought a new sense of hope to the community. His intelligence, fresh ideas and energy inspired the congregation. At his induction service he called for “mutual tolerance” within the community and between Jews and their gentile neighbours.<sup>14</sup>

Coleman’s first order of business was to take charge of the Jewish education of the children. Here he was assisted by his wife who looked after the younger children. A kindergarten was established and *cheder* classes rearranged.<sup>15</sup> Trying to bring the younger members of the community back into the synagogue, Coleman organized a children’s service. Vivian Bortz was the first to read the lesson of the week and this initiative continued to be successful during Coleman’s tenure.<sup>16</sup> In spite of these efforts it was reported that only 28 children were attending *cheder*.<sup>17</sup> Coleman also tried to bring about some decorum in the synagogue but noted on a number of occasions that this was unsuccessful.<sup>18</sup> Thinking ahead, he requested that a Ministers’ pension plan be set up and this was agreed to by the congregation.<sup>19</sup> Under his directive, Mrs. Waks compiled a monthly bulletin called *Hakahal* (The Community) which informed congregants of local news, times of services and gave relevant

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 1 September 1946.

<sup>10</sup> *Zionist Record* August 1946.

<sup>11</sup> PHCMB 12 June 1947.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 12 June 1947.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 18 August 1947.

<sup>14</sup> *South African Jewish Times* undated article.

<sup>15</sup> PHCMB 29 August 1947.

<sup>16</sup> *South African Jewish Times* undated article.

<sup>17</sup> PHCMB 10 March 1948.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 21 October 1947.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 19 September 1947.

rabbinic comment. Most of his endeavours for the community were greeted with success.<sup>20</sup>

On 14 May 1948 the establishment of the State of Israel was declared.<sup>21</sup> Potchefstroom Jewry celebrated with a thanksgiving service at the Synagogue followed by a Ball held by the Zionist Association. Local dignitaries were invited and the fund raising efforts as a result were very successful.<sup>22</sup> The community, having worked to this end for almost 50 years, was elated and felt that they had contributed both financially and by sending some of their younger members to fight in the War of Liberation. As part of *Machal*,<sup>23</sup> a group of volunteers from abroad who helped fight in the Israeli War of Independence, number of young Potchefstroom Jews went to Israel. Lionel Bloch a young congregant was one of those killed.<sup>24</sup> Congratulatory telegrams were sent to the Israeli *Knesset*<sup>25</sup> and a letter of thanks for his continuous support was written to the South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts. A small number of Potchefstroom Jews would later settle in Israel.<sup>26</sup> Although there was strong support for the Zionist ideology in Potchefstroom very few members actually wanted to settle in Israel. They were now becoming comfortable in South Africa and felt this country was home. Of the members of the younger generation who chose to leave the country, most sought opportunities in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. There was a certain comfort in knowing that a the Jewish State was now a reality and possibly a safeguard against another Holocaust type scenario. However this did not mean that all Jews felt the need to make Aliyah.<sup>27</sup>

In the same month Dr. D F Malan's Nationalists swept to victory in the unexpected defeat of Jan Smuts' United Party. South African Jewry feared that the antisemitism of the early years would be institutionalized and were uncertain that their rights would be upheld.<sup>28</sup> However Malan made every effort to assure the community that these

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview Mrs. J Waks.

<sup>21</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>22</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book. 30 May 1948.

<sup>23</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>24</sup> *Zionist Record* 26 August 1949.

<sup>25</sup> Parliament.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews V Bortz, S Jedeikin, L Herr, etc.

<sup>27</sup> To emigrate to Israel.

<sup>28</sup> Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, pp. 206-208.

fears were unfounded.<sup>29</sup> Apartheid laws would later be promulgated but the status of Jews in the country seemed secure. Later the regulations of the Group Areas Act were enacted in Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp.<sup>30</sup> The Jewish reaction from the town appears to have been one of compliance with regulations. As they were not directly affected and probably did not want to revive any of the old feelings of antisemitism they kept quiet on the matter.<sup>31</sup>

Although the political situation of the country was a source of discussion, day to day communal life continued as usual. Even though Rev. Coleman injected a new vibrancy into the community he found it hard to attract congregants to the Synagogue for services.<sup>32</sup> As one of his last duties to the community Rev. Coleman held a "Third Seder"<sup>33</sup> at the Communal Hall during the Passover Week. This was a chance for the *cheder* pupils to perform a play "It Is No Legend" recounting Israel's reestablishment in the holy land. Various papers which the school children had prepared were read. Cantor Daviat had come from Johannesburg and led Rev. Coleman's choir. Prizes were awarded by Mrs. Coleman to deserving students. The evening was a success and enjoyed by all those who attended.<sup>34</sup> This was one of Coleman's attempts at re-involving the community in religious life. In May 1949 after only two years in Potchefstroom Rev. Coleman resigned having been offered a post in Bloemfontein.<sup>35</sup> The chairman of the Congregation, Hyman Sandler, congratulated Coleman on his new post expressing the belief that it was important for Rabbis to move around and strengthen other communities once their work in a particular place was complete. It is uncertain whether a Rabbi's work in a congregation can ever be completed but Coleman had worked hard in Potchefstroom and had the gratitude of the community. Coleman's dedication to building up the youth participation in communal affairs was especially noted.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> Davenport p. 364.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews, L. Shulman, J. Waks, L. Herr.

<sup>32</sup> Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 29 August 1948.

<sup>33</sup> A seder is a meal where the Passover story is recited.

<sup>34</sup> *South African Jewish Times* 29 April 1949.

<sup>35</sup> PHCMB 10 May 1949.

<sup>36</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 1 July 1949.

After Coleman's departure, numerous Rabbis were interviewed and it was decided to employ Rev. Phillip Rosenberg.<sup>37</sup> Rev. Rosenberg and his wife were welcomed to the community and requested to continue Rev. Coleman's excellent work.<sup>38</sup> For the first time in two decades it was recorded that *cheder* classes were growing. After a warning from another country congregation the committee questioned Rev. Rosenberg's credentials. After only six months, he resigned with immediate effect.<sup>39</sup>

With Rosenberg's departure the community was plunged into crisis. Rabbis had become very difficult to locate in the wake of the destruction of European Jewry. Eastern Europe had been an important source of rabbinic training and subsequent efforts to train Rabbis in the Western world could not meet the rising demand. Those Rabbis who would come out to South Africa wanted posts with important communities and refused to go to smaller towns. Sonia Gamsu, a local teacher, eventually took over the running of the *cheder* classes. Even with her assistance enrollment dropped considerably and it was questioned whether the school should remain open.<sup>40</sup> Rev. Kaplan, who had served the community a decade and a half before, applied for the vacancy and was accepted to the post. Unfortunately ill health prevented him from taking up this position.<sup>41</sup>

It was during this period of despondency that the committee acceded to the wishes of some of its members and allowed women to join its ranks. The first female members to join the committee in 1950 were Julie Waks and Mrs. Singer.<sup>42</sup> It was the first time that women would share in the decision making and help guide the destiny of this organ of the community. By 1951 the community numbered 490<sup>43</sup>. Attendance at services and communal meetings was described as "deplorable"<sup>44</sup> as it was clear that members had lost interest in the community.<sup>45</sup> When AS Shulman accepted the position of chairman of the committee he lamented the decline of the "Congregation that was rated supreme amongst the country's congregations, we have become a 4<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> PHCMB 21 June 1949. Nothing could be traced relating to Rosenberg's origins or his later activities.

<sup>38</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 28 October 1949.

<sup>39</sup> PHCMB 18 January 1950.

<sup>40</sup> PHCMB 24 September 1950.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 23 September 1950.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 10 October 1950.

<sup>43</sup> *Union of South Africa Population Census 1951*, Government Printer, Pretoria 1956.

<sup>44</sup> PHCMB 27 Aug 1950.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 7 October 1950.



rate one, a sorry state indeed.” Despite this exaggeration there were serious problems within the community that needed to be addressed. As a group isolated from the larger Jewish community in a place like Johannesburg, would it be possible to resuscitate Jewish communal life? The towns’ community had always struggled with attendance at synagogues, lectures and meetings as well as enduring financial problems. Shulman called for help in the speedy rebuilding of Jewish life in Potchefstroom.<sup>46</sup> This never really happened but the community struggled on for many years to come. On a positive note special notice was drawn to the fact that members of the Potchefstroom community had donated the greatest sum to date of £12000 to that years IUA appeal. Once again it was asserted that the community was made up of “cheque-book” Jews rather than committed members.<sup>47</sup>

Notwithstanding this decline notable visitors were still brought to Potchefstroom during this period. Among them were the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Israel Brodie<sup>48</sup> and Abraham Sutzkever, poet and survivor of the Vilna Ghetto.<sup>49</sup> Although they were warmly received communal minutes continue to refer to a lack of interest by local members.<sup>50</sup> The most likely reason for the poor attendance at these two talks is that congregants were only given last minute warning of their arrival and both took place over the school holiday when a number of families were either away or otherwise occupied. One of those interviewed stated that the Holocaust being Sutzkever’s topic of discussion, had deterred a number of the potential audience as they found it too traumatic to listen to the experiences yet again.<sup>51</sup>

Finally after a year of fruitless interviews Rev. Y Kemelman was engaged.<sup>52</sup> Born in Jerusalem and trained at Rav Kook’s Central Universal Yeshiva there, Kemelman was a qualified teacher. He had previously served as minister at Vryburg.<sup>53</sup> Kemelman’s tenure in Potchefstroom lasted five years. It took him that time to attempt to rebuild the infrastructure of the community. By the time Kemelman arrived membership had dropped by 15% and these numbers would never be increased. Most of those who left

<sup>46</sup> PHCMB 27 August 1950.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 28 August 1949.

<sup>48</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 28 April 1950

<sup>49</sup> *The Zionist Record* 27 October 1950.

<sup>50</sup> PHCMB 11 December 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Interview M Shoot.

<sup>52</sup> PHCMB 28 March 1951.

<sup>53</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 26 October 1951.

the town went to Johannesburg.<sup>54</sup> Continued poor attendance of services remained an important concern of the committee throughout Kemelman's time there.

As Potchefstroom's community began to shrink so did those of the outlying areas. As the much smaller communities began shutting down Potchefstroom was able to draw fresh energy from their residents who joined the congregation. The few remaining residents of Carltonville began attending holy day services in Potchefstroom and some even moved into the town slightly increasing numbers, if only for a short time.<sup>55</sup> Similarly the community at Viljoenskroon closed their Synagogue and gave their *Sefer Torah* to be held in trust in Potchefstroom.<sup>56</sup> Shortly thereafter the community at Maquassi closed its doors and Potchefstroom drew a few of their members as well as their religious artifacts.<sup>57</sup> In 1953 Kemelman warned the community about the disintegration of Jewish life in Potchefstroom. He referred to "intermarriage, poor attendance at services and stressed the necessity for cooperation between the *cheder* and home life."<sup>58</sup> These were all clear signs of further assimilation and applied to the broader South African Jewish country communities as well. The trappings of modernity had taken the centrality of the Synagogue and its importance to a secondary position in secular Jewish life. Although a committee was set up to look at these questions very little could be done to rectify the situation.

In 1953, in an attempt to inspire the community to action the Jewish Board of Deputies held their annual conference in Potchefstroom. The event was a great success and the community was thanked for its warm hospitality to the delegates.<sup>59</sup> That Friday night the Synagogue was filled to capacity but once the conference was over the problem of poor attendance continued. Another event which drew huge crowds to the synagogue was the first *Bat Mitzvah*<sup>60</sup> celebrations in the town which took place in 1954. The six girls were Hazel Jacobs, Valerie Katz, Alta Lits, Sandra Miller and the sisters Annette and Pamela Miller.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> PHCMB 26 August 1951.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 8 October 1952.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 24 January 1953.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 30 June 1953.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 28 December 1953.

<sup>59</sup> *Zionist Record* 13 February 1953.

<sup>60</sup> Confirmation service for Jewish girls.

<sup>61</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 11 June 1954.

A year later, in 1955, for the first time in two decades it was reported that there was a deficit in Synagogue accounts and that an overdraft facility would need to be requested from the bank.<sup>62</sup> Clearly this was due to a shrinking communal base and a decline in interest in communal affairs of those who remained. Also as the community aged those with fixed incomes were no longer able to contribute as generously as before.

Rev. Kemelman requested a longer period of leave to travel back home to Israel. His committee refused to grant this request and he promptly resigned.<sup>63</sup> A controversy was sparked on Kemelman's departure when a reporter in Johannesburg claimed his reason for leaving was "boredom".<sup>64</sup> Isadore Waks, past chairman of the congregation, felt that Potchefstroom, being one of the larger platteland towns, acted as "spring board by Rabbis wishing to make their way to larger communities."<sup>65</sup> Kemelman denied that this was his reason for leaving and cited the difficult relationship that existed between him and his committee. After two years of trying to negotiate with the committee he finally decided to move on.<sup>66</sup> The community finally accepted his resignation but wrote to Kemelman in East London asking him to return their copy of *Webster's Dictionary* and their ladder, which he had apparently taken with him.<sup>67</sup> Waks' assertion that Rabbis were using towns like Potchefstroom as a means to achieving better positions was quite valid. The community had experienced this many times over and the most recent group of Rabbis had all found better positions once they had left the town. A Rev. Epstein was the next minister, cantor and teacher of the congregation.<sup>68</sup> He seems to have remained in the town for only a short while as his name does not appear in any communal records.

Councillor Mokie Singer was appointed the first Jewish mayor of Potchefstroom in 1957. Chief Rabbi Dr. Louis Rabinowitz officiated at the mayoral Sunday in the Synagogue and made certain that psalms were read in Afrikaans to accommodate

---

<sup>62</sup> PHCMB 1 August 1955.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 25 May 1956.

<sup>64</sup> *Zionist Record* undated article.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 4 May 1956.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 18 May 1956.

<sup>67</sup> PHCMB 29 May 1959.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 14 July 1956.

members of the general community.<sup>69</sup> It was now clear that Jews were accepted as equals by the wider community and could serve in the highest office of the town. This was a phenomenon that had been experienced throughout South Africa from the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> In this respect Potchefstroom lagged behind in its ability to elect Jews to high office. Singer, however, might have been the first Jew in the community to have been greatly involved in civil as well as communal affairs. The Singer family's impact on the town was honoured when a street was given their name and another three streets called after the three Singer grandchildren, Jacob, Howard and Jonathan.<sup>71</sup> Finally this showed that Jews and non-Jews were now on an even keel. Singer's appointment to authority demonstrates how far the community had come from its humble immigrant beginnings just a half a century earlier.

In July 1957 the community engaged Rev. Cecil M Bloch as their new minister. Rev. Bloch, who was born in Ireland, served in Japan, Burma and Malaya during the Second World War. He qualified with a BA (Honours) in Biblical Studies, English Literature and Philology, German Language and Literature, Latin, Philosophy and Psychology (Strasburg University and UNISA).<sup>72</sup> Having served numerous other communities he knew how to deal with difficult committee members. His twelve year stay at Potchefstroom was almost without incident and he and his wife and sons endeared themselves to the community. Bloch, who continued his studies while in Potchefstroom, was comfortable in his position and the community welcomed most of his ideas. It seems that a mutual approval of each other existed.

Bloch brought to Potchefstroom the stability that was sorely lacking before and provided the necessary continuity during a time of declining numbers. Unfortunately in the preceding decade almost 200 Jews had left, representing a loss of 40% to the community. There were now 300 Jews in the town including those at the Military Camp on census night.<sup>73</sup> The majority of those who left had settled in Johannesburg or elsewhere in the Union. There were, of course, some who had emigrated. Of those who remained half were older married couples, then there were older single people,

---

<sup>69</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 1 March 1957.

<sup>70</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 10 September 1954.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 26 July 1957.

<sup>73</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book 1959-1960*.

and fewer families with young children. In an attempt to bolster the numbers Bloch took on the chaplaincy at the military camp where he conducted “Padre’s Hour” on a monthly basis. It appears that recruits did not always want to join in community activities. Although there were suspected to be many more Jewish recruits at the camp 14 were the average number of attendees at his talks.<sup>74</sup> New recruits raised the issue of antisemitic outbreaks by officers towards trainees and Bloch took this matter up with the Brigadier in charge.<sup>75</sup> While in Potchefstroom Bloch attended the University and graduated with distinction with a BA (Honours) in Religious Studies.<sup>76</sup>

The last of the pioneering members of the community had grown old and passed away. Herman Rubinstein was the only known Jewish centenarian in the town. He had arrived in South Africa in the 1880s, settled in Potchefstroom in the 1890s and lived there until his death in 1956.<sup>77</sup> It was decided to name the Hebrew School after the late Louis Klivjansky who had dedicated most of his time and effort to this institution’s improvement.<sup>78</sup>

During the *Rosh Hashana* services of 1964 Rev. Bloch had made a speech from the pulpit criticizing certain members of the community and bringing attention to one of them who was reading a novel during prayers.<sup>79</sup> He disapproved of the level of disinterest shown by congregants in communal affairs and their apparent loss of religious commitment. There were those who drove to Synagogue on *Shabbat* and holy days and he felt that this was not becoming of an Orthodox congregation. It was clear that most of the community had embraced a very secular way of life which did not meet his religious outlook. Bloch was immediately called before the committee and requested to refrain from publically attacking personalities. They explained that what he criticized was common South African Orthodox Jewish practice and that he was not there to change their way of being. In an attempt to keep his position he agreed with this criticism and apologized to those that he had offended.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> PHCMB 28 August 1962.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 14 February 1966.

<sup>76</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 22 December 1961.

<sup>77</sup> *Zionist Record* 20 April 1956.

<sup>78</sup> PHCMB 8 Nov 1965.

<sup>79</sup> Jewish New Year.

<sup>80</sup> PHCMB 9 September 1964 and 12 October 1964.

Even as the downsizing of the military training camp briefly affected commerce in the town, many businesses were able to see out this economic downturn. Chief among them was the malt industry. William Kirsh's malt factory, at Sackville Siding (now Safar), which was by now 40 years old, was supplying malt throughout South Africa. The competition in the form of the Levy family were nearly as successful. Both the Kirsh and Levy factories had to move outside of the town due to the foul odour produced during the malt making process. The new Levy factory was situated in an area which later became known as Potchindustria. The Shapiro and Metz families were also involved in the malt-making business. By 1963 the Levy and Kirsh factories had grown considerably and an amalgamation was agreed upon. Thus the King Food Corporation was born, the largest malt manufacturer in South Africa, and indeed the world.<sup>81</sup>

Finn Brothers and Lawrie dominated wholesale merchandising in the Transvaal and later claimed the title of largest country wholesalers in South Africa.<sup>82</sup> In 1965 when Harry Finn sold his share of the business the local newspaper proclaimed him a "Millionaire" and described his many successes from his humble beginnings in London's East End. Finn had also been a stalwart of the Zionist Association from its early beginnings.<sup>83</sup> Finn Brothers and Lawrie employed many Jewish clerks and salespeople a number of whom credited their later commercial ventures to working for this firm.<sup>84</sup>

Having gained invaluable trade experience in general dealer stores in the early years most Jewish shopkeepers had diversified into a focused aspect of sales by the post War period. These typically Jewish owned businesses were furniture stores, dry cleaners, bottle stores, hotels, a supermarket, a stationer, a hair salon, an electrical shop, butchers, bakers, clothiers, a garage and a motor dealership among them.<sup>85</sup> In 1964 Phil Vogelmann opened the first "exclusive" restaurant at his King's Hotel. It advertised a "nice, secluded atmosphere with low lights and soft music".<sup>86</sup> Although

---

<sup>81</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 7 July 1961, 6 March 1975, Interviews and correspondence Levy and Kirsh families.

<sup>82</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 26 March 1965. Interview and correspondence M Finn.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Interview and correspondence M Finn.

<sup>85</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* undated.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 1964.

there was still a class divide in the community this had become less important than in earlier times when Synagogue seating was an issue. While there was still an element of jealousy between the haves and have-nots, but this was now less apparent as the community continued to shrink.

Professional services were also provided. There were a number of well known Jewish doctors, dentists, pharmacists, accountants and lawyers in the town. Very few members of the community had chosen to go into farming with only five known farmers during this period: the Lewins, Swartzbergs, Michelows, Perls and Goldbergs. It was harder to raise a family and educate children in the Jewish way of life at such a distance from an organized community. When the distances between the farms and the town became too great to cover on a daily basis, Jewish children often boarded in Potchefstroom in order to attend school and cheder afterwards.<sup>87</sup> This wide diversity of commercial and professional enterprise shows that the Jewish community had assimilated into South African society and at least in their business endeavours were indistinguishable from their local neighbours.

Sport was a way for the children to get to meet peers from other backgrounds and communities. This involvement in sport shows yet another form of acculturation into South African society.<sup>88</sup> Of the leisure activities, it seems that badminton was one of the most popular among the Jewish youth. The Jewish Badminton Club rented the communal hall for meetings and was allowed access as long as there were no other meetings booked for that space.<sup>89</sup> They played against local teams and those from other towns. Problems arose when it was discovered that *cheder* children were playing badminton instead of attending their classes. In order to solve this issue the Hall was kept locked during *cheder* hours.<sup>90</sup> The local junior team was dubbed the “Kreplich kids” and travelled around the district.<sup>91</sup> An unintended consequence of using the hall for sports was continuous damage to the flooring, which needed to be replaced on a regular basis. Costs were absorbed by the Synagogue committee who recognized the

---

<sup>87</sup> Interview Dr. Goldberg.

<sup>88</sup> Mendelsohn and Shain, *The Jews in South Africa*, p. 157.

<sup>89</sup> PHCMB 15 Dec 1945.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 28 Jul 1953.

<sup>91</sup> *Potchefstroom Herald* 14 August 1959.

benefit of sports for local youth. Golf, snooker, swimming and bowls were also popular sports.<sup>92</sup>

Communal work and entertainment provided a much needed break from the boredom of life in an isolated town. Charitable outreach was fostered by the Union of Jewish Women. They hosted numerous fundraising events for the various charities which they supported. The most successful of these was the production of the comedy "Love's a Luxury" which received great acclaim.<sup>93</sup> Abe Silber wrote and starred in a radio play based on his experience of missing an airplane which later crashed. "Death Touched My Shoulder" was heard across the country and received glowing reviews.<sup>94</sup> Rev. Bloch invited the community to lectures during Jewish Book month but the response was poor.<sup>95</sup> However, when prominent Advocate Issie Maisels addressed the community the lecture was very well attended and it was pointed out that "a good speaker draws a good crowd."<sup>96</sup>

The 1960s saw an increasingly strained relationship between South Africa and Israel. As South Africa passed more laws entrenching its Apartheid system she became relatively isolated politically from the rest of the world. When it came to voting against South Africa's racist policies at the United Nations in 1961, Israel abstained from the vote of the Africa bloc against South Africa. As a result the South African government, offended by Israel's position, prevented funds collected by Jewish charities from being transferred to Israel. This situation continued until Israel's Six Day War in 1967 which normalized ties between Israel and South Africa.<sup>97</sup> In Potchefstroom the community held a fete to collect money to aid the War effort. The fete was a great success and the Jewish community was overwhelmed by the support that they received from all sections of the town. They finally felt that they were accepted.<sup>98</sup> However there was nothing that could prevent more people from leaving the town and now the community numbered only 210.<sup>99</sup> The causes for this departure

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 22 May 1953.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 9 December 1960.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 16 March 1962.

<sup>95</sup> PHCMB 26 November 1963.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 23 March 1964.

<sup>97</sup> Shimoni pp. 305-352.

<sup>98</sup> Interviews V Bortz, J Waks, etc.

<sup>99</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book 1967-68.*



remain the same as those discussed earlier. As the community membership base continued to shrink it would become harder to maintain the communal infrastructure.

## Chapter 8: Epilogue 1968-2008.

By the late 1960s most of South Africa's Jewish population was urbanized. The pull of the big cities would eventually reduce the membership of the country communities to a mere shadow of their former numbers. In 1968 there were seventy Jewish families representing 210 people in Potchefstroom and the district.<sup>1</sup> The decades that followed saw the disintegration of the community, mainly through members moving to Johannesburg, other large South African centres and overseas. It is a tribute to community leadership and its dedicated members that the Congregation was able to survive intact for as long as it did.

After twelve years of dedicated service to the community Rev. Bloch resigned his post. His incumbency had been relatively trouble free and he had developed a good working relationship with his committee. On his departure it was noted that a replacement of similar stature and ability would be very difficult to locate.<sup>2</sup> This had been a constant problem for the community and as the numbers declined it became harder to attract good religious leadership. It was to take two years before this position was filled. During this period Synagogue and *cheder* attendance dwindled and Jewish residents of the town, once, again, seemed to lose interest in communal affairs. A number of Rabbis were interviewed but rejected for various reasons. Most importantly the candidate would need to be an excellent teacher in order to draw children back to the *cheder*. The community would also need a strong leader to help it through the difficult times which were anticipated.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually it was decided to accept the application of Rev. I Mark, a Rumanian, who had spent many years in Israel. Just prior to arriving in Potchefstroom Mark had obtained his Masters degree in Religious Studies.<sup>4</sup> His induction ceremony was timed to coincide with

---

<sup>1</sup> *SA Jewish Year Book 1967/8.*

<sup>2</sup> PHCMB 8 June 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 11 January 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Congregation and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Synagogue. The celebration was attended by the entire community, as well as specially invited dignitaries. The event was a great success and donations received exceeded all expectations.<sup>5</sup>

One of Rev. Mark's first duties was to attend to the Jewish trainees at the Military Camp. In 1971 there were a record 95 of them. As not all were observant Jews their attendance at synagogue and community functions varied. Regret was expressed by the community that they could not invite all the recruits home for a Sabbath meal but this had become impossible due to the community's dwindling numbers. Mark tried to see that they were served a Kosher meal in the Hall after services where he would then lecture them on Jewish culture.<sup>6</sup>

Mark attempted to reform *cheder* classes but found that his new timetable clashed with other school activities which the students felt were more important. He also requested that those attending evening prayers remain for fifteen minutes afterwards to discuss items of Jewish interest. This idea was also rejected.<sup>7</sup> He was however pleased that evening prayers were able to be held daily, though those in the morning were often missed.<sup>8</sup> Eventually Mark confided that "he feels he has not got the support of the Congregants" and "that he has not been able to attract the people to Shul and even some who used to attend don't come any more and feels his leadership has been rejected." He then requested to be released early from his contract.<sup>9</sup> The committee who were dissatisfied with his work agreed. He had been with the community for just one year.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the community found themselves without a Rabbi once again. In May 1972 they engaged Rev. Chaim Davidowitz who had on occasion stood in for other Rabbis.<sup>11</sup> Davidowitz felt that he was making progress with the *cheder* classes although it was

---

<sup>5</sup> PHCMB 8 February 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 27 January 1971.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 8 February 1971.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 7 March 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 1 November 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 10 January 1972.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 8 May 1972.

noted that quite a number of the community's children were not attending.<sup>12</sup> In 1974 he took long leave and decided not to return to Potchefstroom. He cited illness as his reason for taking a post elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> As communities began to shrink in number it became more difficult for them to retain their Rabbi's. It was especially difficult for those who were young and filled with new ideas, to work with aging, small-town congregants. In spite of this lack of religious continuity Synagogue services continued, under the assumption of lay leadership. In a bid to save expenses and unite all the various committees, in March 1974 the community decided to restructure its organizations and brought all its various institutions under one umbrella group. These included the Synagogue committee, the Zionist association, the Union of Jewish Women, the IUA and UCF appeals, and the Hebrew School. The newly formed group would be known as the United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom.<sup>14</sup> At least the administration of the communal infrastructure would now be easier to maintain by the few members of the community who were taking an interest.

The next religious leader to come to Potchefstroom was Rabbi Harvey Cohen. His duties included leading twice daily and Sabbath services, teaching *cheder* classes, ministering to the trainees at the military camp and visiting the patients at the Witrand Institution. By the mid 1970s Kosher meat was being supplied from Johannesburg so slaughtering was no longer one of his duties.<sup>15</sup> After just two months in his post Rabbi Cohen resigned.<sup>16</sup> On further investigation it was discovered that Cohen did not have a work permit and would have to leave South Africa. He was unable to refund the community the money they had provided for the passage of himself and his wife to South Africa. He had been recommended to the congregation by the Jewish Board of Deputies, who the congregation felt should have ironed out these problems before sending him. The Board

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 11 June 1973.

<sup>13</sup> PHCMB 18 Feb 1974.

<sup>14</sup> United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book (UNHIPMB) 11 March 1974.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 14 October 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 19 December 1974.

of Deputies apologised for the error in judgement and Rabbi Cohen's debt was written off.<sup>17</sup>

Addressing the Congregation's Annual General Meeting, the Chairman, Nathan Bortz, asserted that "the community is dwindling and only a miracle can save the position."<sup>18</sup> There were now only 170 Jews in the town and this included the fluctuating numbers at the Military camp. With this in mind there appears to have been about 100 permanent Jewish residents in the town. The 'miracle' arrived a year and three months later in the person of Rabbi Mordechai Alpert and his wife, Carmela.<sup>19</sup> From the outset their rapport with the community was a special one. Alpert's impact was immediately felt and he was especially successful in drawing children back into communal life and getting them to attend *cheder* classes.<sup>20</sup> A roster was set up and the military trainees were sent to different homes each Sabbath.<sup>21</sup> They were also invited to a communal Breaking of the Fast after *Yom Kippur* services.<sup>22</sup> Cheder classes were now very small as many younger members of the community had left Potchefstroom or were boarders in Johannesburg. However the Hebrew Schools Inspector complemented Alpert on his teaching and the level of learning that his students had achieved.<sup>23</sup>

Political unrest in South Africa prompted many Jews to consider emigration as a serious option. This sounded the death knell for the already small country communities. The violent putting down of the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976, a response by black students to being taught in Afrikaans, sparked the armed struggle against the Apartheid government. Many Jewish residents, fearing for their safety, made the choice to leave the country and begin new lives abroad. Patterns showed that each time there was renewed

---

<sup>17</sup> N. Bortz's speech at the Annual General Meeting of the United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom 16 Mar 1975.

<sup>18</sup> United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book 16 March 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 16 June 1976.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 20 February 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 7 June 1977.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 1 August 1977.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 24 January 1978.

unrest more people left. This would continue into the next decades.<sup>24</sup> The Potchefstroom community lost many members to emigration.

As a result of decreasing numbers in the community the Habonim Youth Movement ceased to exist in Potchefstroom towards the end of 1978. An unsuccessful attempt was made at resuscitation. There were just too few children to take part.<sup>25</sup> In 1978 the Military Camp finally appointed a dedicated Theological Officer for its Jewish trainees. Alpert would only need to attend Chaplain's hour at the Camp once a week.<sup>26</sup> After two and half years Alpert was offered work in Johannesburg. He and his wife were thanked for all the wonderful work they had done in restoring the community and were released from their contract.<sup>27</sup>

Over the next few months the community was again faced with same problems which cropped up each time there was no Rabbi. Poor attendance at the Synagogue and *cheder* classes was noted.<sup>28</sup> An additional problem was the neglected state of the Synagogue buildings which would be very costly to repair. As there was still a healthy budget surplus all necessary repairs were carried out.<sup>29</sup> More South African Jews were now travelling overseas and whilst visiting Tel Aviv, chairman of the community, Bernard Gamsu, interviewed a number of candidates for the post of Rabbi and was most impressed by Rabbi Asher Parshani. Although Hebrew was his mother tongue he was prepared to take an intensive two month course in English before proceeding to South Africa.<sup>30</sup> Within just a few months of his appointment Parshani asked for a raise in salary. The congregation felt that this request was inappropriate as Parshani had not had enough time to prove himself to them.<sup>31</sup> He further stated the he and his wife felt very isolated in Potchefstroom as none of the congregants visited them and he felt that he was being

---

<sup>24</sup> A A Dubb, *The Jewish Population of South Africa: The 1991 Sociodemographic Survey*, Kaplan Centre, Cape Town, 1994, pp. 12-15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 11 September 1978.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 10 April 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 6 January 1979.

<sup>28</sup> United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book 26 June 1979.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 9 February 1979.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 29 October 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 7 January 1981.

ignored and slighted.<sup>32</sup> He was also distressed at the lack of parents' interest in their children's *cheder* education. He requested that his contract be terminated.<sup>33</sup> Clearly communal relations with religious leadership were strained. Both the community and the Rabbi might have been more accommodating. It was now becoming apparent that Potchefstroom would not be able to draw a young and dynamic Rabbi to its congregation.

The community hoped to share the services of Rabbi Medalie who had been appointed Chaplain at the Military Camp. This was agreed to by the military authorities but never came about as the hours he would serve could not be agreed upon.<sup>34</sup> In 1982 Rabbi Gershon Engel was appointed to the post. He had been Country Communities Rabbi to the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Potchefstroom community had had a long association with him.<sup>35</sup> Many problems were now encountered as the community continued to shrink. Synagogue attendance had fallen off considerably and all involved were beginning to wonder whether Potchefstroom could sustain a Rabbi for much longer.<sup>36</sup> Engel was the last to fill the position of Rabbi in Potchefstroom and when he was approached to take over as Rabbi in Klerksdorp he accepted the position. He had served in Potchefstroom for six years.<sup>37</sup> The community did not attempt to find a replacement. For holiday services they employed students from Johannesburg and lay leadership continued for a period in the Synagogue.<sup>38</sup> After Engel's departure the needs of the community were looked after the Country Communities Department of the Jewish Board of Deputies. Biannual visits were made by Rabbi Shalom Zaiden and his successor Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft. They also attended to the life cycle events when they occurred.<sup>39</sup>

As the community continued shrinking, very few antisemitic incidents were reported during the 1970s and 1980s. Those that did occur were at the boarding school and

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 15 January 1981.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 5 July 1981.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 7 January 1982.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 24 August 1982.

<sup>36</sup> United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book 25 March 1984.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 23 November 1987.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 7 September 1988.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence with Rabbi M Silberhaft.

military camp.<sup>40</sup> No details of what transpired were recorded.<sup>41</sup> By this time antisemitism had faded into the background as South African Jewry were confident in the position in society. However in January 1988, the Tahara House, at the Jewish cemetery was daubed with swastikas. The culprits were never found.<sup>42</sup> It was felt that this was the work of one of the neo-Nazi groups that was gaining popularity in the area, most probably the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB). The AWB gained a considerable following in the political turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their leader, Eugene Terra'Blanche had grown up in Potchefstroom and was then living in Ventersdorp. The AWB did not hide its antisemitic policies. In 1992 The Potchefstroom University published extremely offensive Holocaust jokes in their rag magazine "Die Pukkie". Ex-Potchefstroom resident, Professor Harold Rudolph, then Chairman of the Transvaal Council of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, stressed that "these blatant antisemitic jokes were to be condemned in the strongest of terms, especially coming out of a university!" Professor Carools Reinecke, Rector of the University, immediately apologised to the Jewish community for this oversight in the editorial process and met with a delegation from the Jewish Board of Deputies.<sup>43</sup>

A sociodemographic survey South African Jewry in the early 1990s listing Potchefstroom with a whole lot of other towns in close proximity, including Bloemhof, Christiana, Coligny, Delareyville, Lichtenburg, Schweizer-Reineke, Ventersdorp and Wolmaranstad, concluded that there were approximately 132 Jews spread among these centres.<sup>44</sup> It was then with great excitement that on 17 May 1992 a documentary and photographic exhibition was held in Potchefstroom to commemorate the history and contribution of the Jews to the town. Material for the exhibition was sourced and compiled by Joy Kropman, of Klerksdorp, together with a team of researchers. Kropman initiated the project 17 months before, after a similarly successful exhibition depicting the Jewish history of Klerksdorp. Members of the community still living in the town and those who had left in the decades before, together with their descendants, were contacted

<sup>40</sup> United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book 24 January 1978.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 12 March 1981.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily News* 8 January 1988.

<sup>43</sup> *The Herald Times* 28 February 1992.

<sup>44</sup> Dubb, pp. 162-165.



for material. The response was overwhelming and photographs and information began pouring in. All surviving communal records were catalogued. Newspapers and local archives were scoured for any mention of Jewish names and communal events. The resulting exhibition was a resounding success. 420 past and present members of the community came from destinations in South Africa and abroad to celebrate the history of their town and the contribution of their families to its success. This reunion elicited a great emotional response from its celebrants many of whom had not seen each other in decades.<sup>45</sup> Letters of congratulations with new information and documentary material continued to arrive for months after the exhibition was held.<sup>46</sup>

The Synagogue property was finally sold in 2000. All items of religious significance were removed including the cornerstone placed there when the foundations were set. When the stone was removed a glass bottle containing the names of the building and synagogue committees was found. In August of that year the final service was held in the building before it was deconsecrated. It was the sad honour of the last President of the Congregation, Issy Kotzen, to give his final speech thanking those visitors who attended and giving a brief history of the Jewish involvement in the town. Once all signs of its former purpose were removed the buildings were taken over by a training school for beauticians.<sup>47</sup>

In 2004 and 2005 a number of Jewish cemeteries in South African country communities were vandalised. Due to their remote locations and dwindling Jewish residents, many others had fallen into disrepair. In 2006, at the initiative of Rabbi Silberhaft, the Potchefstroom cemetery was restored. All but the very largest tombstones were removed from their plinths and placed horizontally above the graves which they marked. A rededication service was held with Jewish residents of the town and visitors from Johannesburg and further afield attending.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> *The Star* 3 June 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Interview J Kropman.

<sup>47</sup> Interview I and B Kotzen.

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence with Rabbi M Silberhaft.

Today there are approximately 10 Jewish residents living in Potchefstroom. Their spiritual needs are taken care of by Rabbi Silberhaft and the Country Communities Department of the Jewish Board of Deputies. Those who are able attend religious services do so in Klerksdorp and Johannesburg.<sup>49</sup> As with all other country communities and even the big cities in South Africa there is now a huge Diaspora of former residents. Apart from those who now live in the larger South African centres, there are Potchefstroom Jews in Israel, Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States, etc. A strong bond remains among these former residents who often meet informally to share memories of their hometown.

The History of Potchefstroom Jewry is typical of small town Jewish communities in South Africa. New immigrants, seeking freedom and economic prosperity were drawn to small towns where they were easily able to establish themselves. There they raised their families and tried to recreate the Jewish communal institutions that they remembered from *der Heim*. While maintaining their Jewish identity there was a clear move toward assimilation and acculturation within the community. The South African born generation was accepted within the host society. As the economic and political situations changed members of the community took opportunities with which they were presented and moved onto other cities, towns and countries. However many remained. The varied experiences along the way provide a glimpse into the lives of these pioneers, their descendants and the community which they created.

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview R Shakinovsky.

## **Bibliography:**

### **A. Primary Sources:**

#### **1. Community Records:**

##### **a. Potchefstroom Jewish Community Records:**

Potchefstroom Chevra Kadisha Pincus (Burial List).

Chevra Kadisha Register, 1906-1990.

Chevra Kadisha Cash Books 1906-1973.

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books.

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Cash Books 1929-1975

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Ketubot (Jewish Marriage Contracts) 1905-1971 (incomplete).

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Marriage Registers 1933-1950; 1941-1947; 1979

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Minute Books (PHCMB) 1919-1973.

Potchefstroom Hebrew Congregation Correspondence 1920s – 1980s. .

Potchefstroom Hebrew School Minute Book 1943-1950.

Potchefstroom Hebrew School Correspondence 1920s -1960s.

Potchefstroom Zionist Society Minute Book (PZSMB) 1909-1926

Potchefstroom Zionist Association Minute Book 1927-1973

Potchefstroom Zionist Association Correspondence 1930s – 1980s

Potchefstroom Zionist Association Cash Books 1919-1929

Union of Jewish Women Minute Books 1945-1973.

Union of Jewish Women Correspondence 1945-1970s.

United Hebrew Institutions of Potchefstroom Minute Book (UNHIPMB) 1974-1990s

##### **b. Old and New Jewish Cemeteries Potchefstroom.**

##### **c. Potchefstroom School Records:**

High School for Boys, Potchefstroom, Attendance Register 1905-1914

Potchefstroom Boys High School Admissions Register

Potchefstroom Girls High School records

##### **d. The Kropman Collection (including community records, correspondence, interviews, newspaper clippings, photographs, exhibition panels.)**

#### **2. Archival Sources:**

##### **a. National Archives, Pretoria:**

##### **Argief Potchefstroom:**

- 59 Landdros Transport Register van Erve, 1860-1888.

- 123 Landdros Register van Burghers & Inwoners 1894-1899; 1896-1897.

- 126a Landdros Register van Burghers & Inwoners 1899.

- 126b Landdros Plaas Register.

- 300 Register van Lisensies 1872-1892.
- 301 Siviele Kommissaris Register van Lisensies 1898-1899
- Misc. Business Records.
- Potchefstroom Municipality Minutes.
- Sivele Kommissaris, register van Trou, Huur en Paggelde en Wegbelasting 1878-1891.

Department of Home Affairs Microfilm Collection: Potchefstroom:

- M6946- M7077 Death Certificates 1889-1933.
- M7443-M7501 Marriage Certificates 1901-1931.

Colonial Secretary (CS) Applications for Naturalization 1902-1910.

Master of the High Court (MHG) Estate Files 1890-1977.

Central Judicial Commission (CJC) Compensation Claims.

b. National Archives: Cape Town:

Colonial Office (CO) Marriage Certificates and Naturalization Records

c. National Archives, Kew:

Passenger Lists, England to South Africa, 1890-1960.

Passenger Lists, South Africa to England, 1890-1960.

d. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives:

SAJBD Archives. Rabinowitz Lists of Jews.

Constitution of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal.

Minute Book of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal 1903-1909.

SAJBD Archives, Zionist Federation Records

SAJBD Archives, South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Executive Council Minutes

South African Jewish Board of Deputies Minute Book

e. Beit Hatefutsot Collection. (Including newspaper clippings and extracts from the Country Rabbi's notes).

f. Cape Town Hebrew Congregation Archive:

Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Burial Register, 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Cemetery.

g. Standard Bank Archives, Johannesburg:

442/Potch:

Inspector's reports 1879-1903

Potchefstroom Signature Books

Potchefstroom Letter Books

Potchefstroom Account Holder's Reports.

h. Censuses:

Transvaal Census, 1904

*First Census of the Union of South Africa, 1911*, Government Printer and Stationer, Pretoria.

*Third Census of Population of the Union of South Africa, 1921*, Government Printer and Stationary Office, Pretoria 1922.

*The Fourth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa 1929*, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1929.

*Union of South Africa Population Census 1951*, Government Printer, Pretoria 1956

i. Newspapers and Periodicals:

*Die Westelike Stem.*

*Graaff-Reinet Herald*

*The Herald Times*

*Jewish Chronicle*, London

*Potchefstroom Herald*

*South African Jewish Chronicle*

*South African Jewish Times*

*The Standard and Diggers' News*

*The Star*

*The Times*, London

*The Zionist Record*

j. Family Records.

k. Interviews and correspondence with former and present residents of Potchefstroom:

Ms B Arenstein,

Mr J Arenstein,

Mrs H Bortz,

Mr V Bortz,

Mrs M Brasch,

Mr K Braun,

Mr M Finn,

Mrs D Friedman,

Ms J Geber,

Dr S Goldberg,

Mr H Gottlieb,

Mr G Green,

Mr E Herr,

Mrs M Herr,

Mr R Herr,

Mr F Hirschmann,

Mr S Jedeiken,

Mr A Judelsohn,

Mrs G Kacev,

Mrs Z Katz,

Mr I Kirsh,

Mrs M Kirsh,

Mrs B Kotzen,  
 Mr I Kotzen,  
 Mrs J Kropman,  
 Dr H Lewis,  
 Prof P Lewsen,  
 Mrs A Lurie,  
 Mr R Lurie,  
 Mrs G Miller,  
 Mr T Miller,  
 Mrs E Schauder,  
 Mrs M Seligman,  
 Ms R Shakinovsky,  
 Mrs M Shoot,  
 Dr L Shulman,  
 Rabbi M Silberhaft,  
 Mrs B Tocker,  
 Mrs J Waks,  
 Mrs C Wiener,  
 Mrs F Winokur.

#### **B. Secondary Sources:**

Abrahams, I., *The Birth of a Community*, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, 1955.

Bradlow, E, "Jewish Refugees at the Cape in the Anglo Boer War" in *Jewish Affairs*, Spring 1999.

Bulpin, TV, *Discovering South Africa*, CAN, Johannesburg, 1992.

Cheifitz, P., *A History of the Jews in Dordrecht*, Cape Town, 1997.

Coetzee, Daniel, *Immigrants to Citizens: Civil Integration and Acculturation of the Jews into Oudtshoorn Society, 1874-1999*, unpublished MA Thesis, Department of History, UCT, 2000.

Davenport, TRH, *South Africa – A Modern History*, MacMillan, London, 1991.

De Saxe, M, *The South African Jewish Year Book 192*, The South African Jewish Historical Society, Johannesburg, 1929.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewish Year Book 1959*, Fieldhill Publishing Co., Johannesburg, 1959.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewish Year Book 1959-60*, Fieldhill Publishing Co., Johannesburg, 1960.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewish Year Book 1961-62*, Fieldhill Publishing Co., Johannesburg, 1961.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewry 1965*, Fieldhill Publishing Co., Johannesburg, 1965.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewry 1967-68*, Fieldhill Publishing Co., Johannesburg, 1967.

Feldberg, L (ed.), *South African Jewry 1976-77*, Alex White & Co., Johannesburg, 1976.

Fleisher, D & Caccia, A, *Merchant Pioneers: The House of Mosenthal*, Jonathan Ball, Cape Town, 1983.

Foster, US National Archives, Washington, Foster Commission 1892.

Furlong, PJ, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1991.

Giliomee, H & Mbenga, B, *New History of South Africa*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2007.

Gitlin, M., *The Vision Amazing – The Story of South African Zionism*, The Menorah Book Club, Johannesburg, 1950.

Goss, I, *Adventure of Jewish Education*, The South African Board of Jewish Education, Johannesburg, 1961.

Greenbaum, M, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945*, Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1995.

Herrman, L, *A History of the Jew in South Africa*, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 1935.

High School For Boys, Potchefstroom , *High School For Boys, Potchefstroom 1905-1955*, pamphlet, 1955.

Hoffmann, ND, *Book of Memoirs: Reminiscences of South African Jewry*, Jewish Publications-South Africa, Cape Town, 1996.

Howe, I, *World of Our Fathers*, Schocken Books, New York, 1989.

Jenkins, G, *A Century History – The Story of Potchefstroom*, A A Balkema, Cape Town, undated.

Jowell, P & Folb, A, *Into Kokerboom Country: Namaqualand's Jewish Pioneers*, Fernwood Press, Cape Town, 2004.

Kaplan, M and Robertson, M, *Founders and Followers, Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*, Vlaeberg Publishers, Cape Town, 1991.

Kaye, H, *The Tycoon and the President: The Life and times of Alois Hugo Nellmapius 1847-1893*, MacMillan, Johannesburg, 1978.

Lewsen, P, *A Dance to the Discords of Time*, Privately Published Memoir, undated.

Longlands Johannesburg and District Directory 1894-1897.

Mabin, A & Conradie, B, eds., *The Confidence of the Whole Country- Standard Bank Reports on Economic Conditions in Southern Africa 1865-1902*, Standard Bank Investment Corporation, Johannesburg, 1987.

Mendelsohn, R., *Sammy Marks 'The Uncrowned King of the Transvaal'*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1991.

Mendelsohn, R & Shain, M, *The Jews in South Africa, an Illustrated History*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2008.

Nasson, B, *The South African War 1899-1902*, Arnold Publishers, London, 1999.

Rabinowitz, LI, "The Transvaal Congregations", in Saron, G & Hotz, L, eds., *The Jews in South Africa – A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955.

Sarid, I and Bartolf, C, *Herman Kallenbach: Mahatma Gandhis friend in South Africa*, Gandhi-Informationen-Zentrum Selbstverlag, Israel, 1997.

Saron, G. and Hotz, L. eds., *The Jews In South Africa –A History*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1955.

Saunders, C, ed., *Illustrated History of South Africa – The Real Story*, Reader's Digest Association, Cape Town, 1988.

Shain, M, *Jewry and Cape Society*, Historical Publication Society, Cape Town, 1983.

Shain, M, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994.

Shain, M and Mendelsohn, R (eds.), *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*", Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2000.



Shimoni, G, *Jews and Zionism – The South African Experience 1910-1967*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980.

South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, *Jewish Life in Country Communities*, Volume I, South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, Johannesburg, 2002.

South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, *Jewish Life in Country Communities*, Volume II, South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, Johannesburg, 2004.

South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, *Jewish Life in Country Communities*, Volume III, South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsot, Johannesburg, 2008.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies, *South African Jews in World War II*, Eagle Press, Johannesburg, 1950.

Town Council, Potchefstroom, *Potchefstroom*, Pamphlet, undated.

van Onselen, C, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914: 1. New Babylon*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982.

Vital, D, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe 1789-1939*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

Wiener, C, *The History of the Pietersburg (Polokwane) Jewish Community*, UNISA, 2007.